

THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE STATE:
STORIES OF ASSASSINS IN EARLY IMPERIAL CHINA

by

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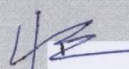
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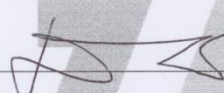
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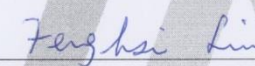
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Abstract

In my thesis I try to give a new reading about the stories of assassins in the Han dynasty. I relate the assassins' figures to Han scholar's thoughts and read these stories as a kind of new relationship between the individual and the state. My research includes the translations of all the Chinese texts I used – many of them are not translated before, and my readings about these texts. By analyzing these stories, we may get the point that assassins shown as a category emerged during the early empires and this emerging category reflect a new conception of an individual's role in history, namely that any given individual can have influence over the fate of the empire.

Introduction

When Zhuan Zhu 專諸 presented a fish to the King of Wu, it gave him chance to draw a dagger and stab the king. Yao Li 要離 took advantage of the wind to assassinate Prince Qing Ji 慶忌 in the boat with a spear. Nie Zheng 聶政 entered the mansion directly with a long sword and kills the minister of the Han 韓 state. Jing Ke 荊軻 presented a coveted map to the King of Qin. When the map unrolled, there was a dagger...

“*Cike*” 刺客, translated as “assassin-retainers,” were a group of specialized people in early Chinese history. Many of their names were not recorded, but some of them were treated as heroes. They might have killed for money or reputation, but some also died for nothing. The story of *cike* began to show up in increasing frequency in Han writings. In this thesis, I will focus on two points: Firstly, I argue that *cike* as a category emerged during the early empires – the Qin (221-206 BCE) and Han (202BCE-220 CE) dynasties. Secondly, this emerging category, I postulate, reflect a new conception of an individual’s role in history, namely that any given individual can have influence over the fate of the empire. The portrayal of the assassins is therefore closely connected with Han writers’ self-conception.

The most representative work of *cike* as a category may be the “*Cike liezhuan*” 刺客列傳 (The Biographies of Assassin-retainers) chapter in *Shiji* 史記 (The Records of the Grand Historian). In this chapter, the author Sima Qian 司馬遷 (?145-?86 BCE) collects the stories of five assassins – Cao Mo 曹沫, Zhuan Zhu, Yu Rang 豫讓, Nie Zheng and Jing Ke – and records them one by one. In his epitome of this chapter, Sima Qian writes:

With the dagger of Master Cao, Lu state gets its land and Qi state shows its trustworthiness. Yu Rang does not change his mind because of his righteousness. Thus, I write the twenty-sixth ranked biographies, “The Biographies of Assassin-retainers.”

曹子匕首，魯獲其田，齊明其信。豫讓義不為二心。作刺客列傳第二十六。

1

1 See Sima Qian, *Shiji* 史記 (Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1999), p. 2503.

Although this paragraph only mentions two assassins, we can still note that Sima Qian does not pick these characters randomly. He chooses these assassins because he believes that their stories reveal their precious inner-qualities, such as trustworthiness and righteousness.

Another good example of *cike* as a category is the carvings in the Wu Liang Shrine. This shrine is located in today's Shandong Province, and it contains the most complete tomb pictures in Han period. The *cike* pictures in the shrine covers six different figures of assassins, who are Cao Mei,² Zhuan Zhu, Jing Ke, Yao Li, Yu Rang and Nie Zheng. In Wu Hung's book *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art*,³ he argues that the assassins are grouped as a category, the "loyalty assassin-retainers," at the equal status with other categories such as "eminent wives," "filial sons," "loving brother" and "good friends." Besides the Wu Liang shrine, Ren Peng 任鵬 points out in his article "Wuliangci de cike huaxiang yanjiu" 武梁祠的刺客畫像研究 (A Research on the Assassin Images in the Wu Liang Shrine)⁴ that there are several additional Han tombs contains the images of assassins in addition to the Wu Liang Shrine.

Moreover, in various Han writings such as *Shuoyuan* 說苑 and *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論, we can find lists of the assassins' names utilized in rhetorical speeches to support arguments. This phenomenon shows that assassin stories were already well-known among Han scholars so that they can be used like the list of sages such as Confucius or King Wen of Zhou. These textual and material sources seem to suggest that assassins were considered to be a special category in the Han period.

In his discussion of depictions of assassins in the Wu Liang shrine, Wu Hung states that

2 The translation of this name, "Cao Mei," follows Wu Huang's translation in his book, and he is the "Cao Mo" one in *Shiji*.

3 Wu Huang, *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art* (Stanford University Press, 1989).

4 Ren Peng 任鵬, "Wuliangci de cike huaxiang yanjiu" 武梁祠的刺客畫像研究, *Qinghua daxue xuebao* 清華大學學報, No. 3(2012): 134-158.

“they were considered heroes because they did not hesitate to sacrifice their own lives to destroy powerful enemies.” This means that the assassins’ loyalty was shown in their sacrifice. What is more, their targets were not their personal enemies, but the enemies of their states. In the “Fengshi” 奉使 (Messengers) chapter of *Shuoyuan* 說苑,⁵ Liu Xiang 劉向 (79-8 BCE) included the story of Tang Ju 唐且 defeating the King of Qin in debate to protect his state. In this story, Tang Ju claimed with a dagger: “If the knight does not burst with anger, then that is that. But if he does burst with anger, then there will be two corpses laid and the blood will flow to five paces far” 士無怒即已，一怒伏尸二人，流血五步。⁶ In this story, Tang Ju did not actually kill the king, but it is his determination in performing the role of an assassin that defeated the King of Qin. Thus assassin stories are good examples for illustrating the power of an individual in potentially changing the fate of an entire state.

In addition, we need to point out that the motif of “*zhiyu*” 知遇, meeting the recognition, often plays a role in narratives of assassins. Eric Henry uses Yu Rang’s story in his article “The Motif of Recognition in Early China.” In *Shiji*, Sima Qian record Yu Rang’s words as:

Yu Rang escaped into the mountain, saying: “Alas, a knight will die for the one who understands him, as a woman will adorn herself for one who delights in her.”

豫讓遁逃山中，曰：“嗟乎！士為知己者死，女為說己者容。”

Yu Rang said: “When I served the Fan and the Zhongxing clans, they all treated me as a common person, so I serve them as a common person. As for the Count of Zhi, he treated me as the state’s hero. Thus, I repay him as a hero.”

豫讓曰：“臣事范、中行氏，范、中行氏皆眾人遇我，我故眾人報之。至於智伯，國士遇我，我故國士報之。”⁷

In Henry’s interpretation of Yu Rang’s action, which will not receive any reward, it “is from principle alone that [Yu Rang] acted.” He also mentions Sima Qian has a very similar

5 Xiang Zonglu 向宗魯, *Shuoyuan jiaozheng* 說苑校正 (Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1987).

6 Original texts see *Shuoyuan jiaozheng*, p.295.

7 Original texts see *Shiji*, p. 1962 -1963.

sentence in his letter to Ren An 任安, which goes “a knight will be employed by the one who understands him, as a woman will adorn herself for one who delights in her” 士為知己者用, 女為說己者容.⁸ Thus assassin narratives often suggest that only when recognized would the heroes be willing to use their individual ability to serve the state. Therefore, I can argue that the descriptions of assassins reveal Han scholars’ new conception of the relationship between an individual and the state.

My research, involves different versions of a given assassin narrative. William G. Boltz’s characterization of early Chinese texts can help us understand this phenomenon.⁹ He argues that early texts are composed of small “building blocks,” self-contained textual units, arranged in sometimes drastically different ways. The received texts are fundamentally composite in nature because “the composition of the ancient texts was not a closed act but one that took shape through acts of intellectual exchange and textual performance.” These texts were not simply handed down from one to another, but were continuously being edited and rearranged, with new sources added.

The different versions of assassin stories, as building blocks, can furthermore be categorized as Paul Van Els and Sarah A. Queen point out, “early Chinese anecdotes typically relate historical events, but they were not necessarily intended or understood as relating events that actually occurred,” but “it seems authors and readers expected the anecdotes to be potentially historically accurate.”¹⁰ In other words, early Chinese anecdotes are based on historical events, but both the authors and readers cannot necessarily verify whether it record what actually happened. They contain the possibilities of the truth, and the authors can edit them with great liberty to support their own arguments.

8 See Ban Gu, *Hanshu* 漢書 (Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1999), p. 2061.

9 Martin Kern, *Text and Ritual in Early China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), chapter 2.

10 Paul van Els and Sarah A. Queen, *Between History and Philosophy: Anecdotes in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), p. 10.

A good example of an early Chinese anecdote is the story of Confucius between Chen and Cai. In texts such as *Analects* 論語, *Mencius* 孟子, *Mozi* 墨子 and *Zhuangzi* 莊子, we find that in many different versions of this story, Confucius behaves differently from version to version. He tends to remain unperturbed in the face of suffering in Confucianism texts, while in *Zhuangzi*, he begins to talk about the relationship between man and heaven. Interestingly in *Mozi*, Confucius is the one criticized for giving up all those sanctimonious behaviors and eating a stolen pig.¹¹ This phenomenon shows that anecdotes in early China are just like vessels, which can be rewritten in order to hold different arguments.

Among the assassin stories, a similar phenomenon can be observed. The story of Zhuan Zhu 專諸, to be discussed in detail in a later chapter, can be found in different sources such as *Shiji*, *Zuozhuan* 左傳, *Wuyue chunqiu* 吳越春秋 and *Liushi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋. These versions' main plots about Zhuan Zhu's action of assassination are the same, but for their details, differ from version to version. For example in *Shiji*, it only states that Wu Zixu 伍子胥 presents Zhuan Zhu to Prince Guang, while in *Wuyue chunqiu*, it gives more details about how they have met. *Zuozhuan* includes more background information about the war between Wu and Chu, while *Liushi chunqiu* focuses on the relationship between former kings of Wu. When reading these texts, we may never know which one reflects the history event that actually occurred. But their similarities and differences offer a way to get closer to these assassins' figures in Han scholars' imagination.

Narratives on assassins are not a new topic and many scholars have already written on them. Chinese scholars tend to interpret these narratives in two ways – “a knight dies for the one who really understands him” and “heroes who resist the cruel government.” Many article can be found about these topics, such as “*Shiji* ‘Cike liezhuan’ cike xingxiang fenxi” 《史

¹¹ More information about this anecdote can be found in John Makeham “Between Chen and Cai: *Zhuangzi* and *Analects*” in *Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 75-100.

記・刺客列傳》刺客形象分析 (Analyzing the Assassin-Retainers' Figures in *Shiji* 'Cike liezhuan')¹² by Wang Xinting 王新婷 and Guo Shiwei 郭師瑋, "Jiedu *Shiji* zhong de cike xingxiang" 解讀《史記》中的刺客形象 (Reading the Assassin-Retainers' Figures in *Shiji*)¹³ by Huo Jianbo 霍建波 and Zhao Xin 趙昕 and "Qianyi 'cike liezhuan' zhong cike de jingshen tezhi" 潛議《刺客列傳》中刺客的精神特質 (Discussing the Inner-qualities of Assassin-Retainers in 'Cike liezhuan')¹⁴ by Zhang Miao 張淼. Some of Chinese scholars also try to rethink these existed readings. The article by Yang Ningning's 楊寧寧 "Shi fankang qiangbao, haishi tongzhizhe de shashou" 是反抗強暴，還是統治者的殺手 (They are the Resisters or the Killers of Rulers),¹⁵ for instance, argues against reading assassins as people who resisted the government, but were instead killers hired by rulers.

At the same time, this topic has not been extensively studied in Western scholarship. But western scholars have produced different readings that do not adhere to the existing interpretative approaches of the Chinese scholars. For example, Stephen Owen, in his "Mutilation and Identity: the Assertion of the Interior Self,"¹⁶ reads the assassins' sacrifice of their bodies as revelation of one's inner-quality. He also relates these accounts to the author Sima Qian, arguing that Sima Qian sees similarity between himself and the assassins. In her article in "Killings and Assassinations in the Spring and Autumn as Records of Judgments,"¹⁷

12 Wang Xinting 王新婷 and Guo Shiwei 郭師瑋, "*Shiji* 'cike liezhuan' cike xingxiang fenxi" 《史記 刺客列傳》刺客形象分析, *Qingnian wenxuejia* 青年文學家, no. 3 (2016): 44.

13 Huo Jianbo 霍建波 and Zhao Xin 趙昕, "Jiedu *Shiji* zhong de cike xingxiang" 解讀《史記》中的刺客形象, *Yuwen xuekan* 語文學刊, no. 7 (2010): 1-2.

14 Zhang Miao 張淼, "Qianyi 'cike liezhuan' zhong cike de jingshen tezhi" 潛議《刺客列傳》中刺客的精神特質, *Beifang wenxue* 北方文學, no. 10 (2017): 228-229.

15 Yang Ningning 楊寧寧, "Shi fankang qiangbao, haishi tongzhizhe de shashou" 是反抗強暴，還是統治者的殺手, *Neimenggu shehui kexue* 內蒙古社會科學, no. 4 (2010): 74-79.

16 Stephen Owen, "Mutilation and Identity: the Assertion of the Interior Self." Paper presented at Mansfield Freeman Lecture, Wesleyan University, February 2, 1995.

17 Newell Ann van Auken, "Killings and Assassinations in the Spring and Autumn as Records of Judgments." *Asia Major: Third Series*, no. 27 (2014): 1-31.

Newell Ann van Auken lists all the assassinations in *Zuozhuan*, and tries to identify the original purpose and function of the *Spring and Autumn* by assassins records through studying the assassination records. She argues that these records are not merely logs of events; on the contrary, they contain judgement behind the records. Since English-language scholarship on the assassins' stories is not yet extensive, I hope my research can bring something new to this topic.

My thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter will introduce concepts related to assassins, which can help provide the historical background of these stories. The second chapter is about Zhuan Zhu, a famous assassin in the state of Wu during the Spring and Autumn Period (722-481 BCE). The third chapter is about Jing Ke, an assassin from the Warring States period (481-221 BCE), perhaps the most famous one in early Chinese history. Both chapters will provide my collection and translation of counts on these two assassins, some of which have not been translated into English before. I will give an overview of these stories and analysis their similarities and differences. The last chapter will examine what I term the "assassin catalogues" from Han sources. In this chapter, I will survey the arguments Han scholars made by utilizing the assassin category. By observing the role assassins play in their arguments, we can discuss why they were highly praised during the Han.

Chapter 1: Concepts Related to Assassins

In this chapter, I will introduce the concepts related to assassins in early China, which can help to understand the discussion part in later chapters. These concepts are coming from different history resources; I will not only translate them into English, but also briefly explain the meaning behind them.

While talking about assassinations, *Zuozhuan* 左傳¹⁸ tend to use the word “*shi*” 弑 which means “regicide.” It is explained as “As for they killed their lord themselves, it is called *shi*. If killed by people out of state, it will be called *qiang*” 戕. In the whole book, the word “*shi*” is used eighty-one times, which can show this kind of “killing their lords” phenomenon is very common in the Spring and Autumn period. However, among all these records, only one assassin’s name is recorded, who is Zhuan Shezhu 鱄設諸. Mostly, the record does not have the name of the real killer. For example:

In the fourth year, spring, Zhouyu in Wei murdered Duke Huan¹⁹ and established himself. Duke Yin²⁰ was meeting with Duke Song, and were about to make a long agreement. The appointed date hadn’t come; people from Wei already came to report the chaos.

四年，春，衛州吁弑桓公而立，公與宋公為會，將尋宿之盟，未及期，衛人來告亂。²¹

In this case, Zhouyu possibly did not kill the Duke with his own hand, he might send his warrior to do this, or maybe he led troops to kill. But still, the record only has his name since he is the one who planned it – and also the one who benefited from the regicide.

Besides, another similar usage is “*shi zei shi*” 使賊弑 – “sending traitors to commit regicide.” Still we cannot see the name of the lord-killer, and they are simply called “*zei*” 賊,

18 Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Chunqiu Zuozhuan Zhu* 春秋左傳註 (Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1990).

19 This is Duke Huan of Wei. Yang Bojun points out this is the beginning of all regicide affairs in the Spring and Autumn Annals.

20 This affair is in the chapter “Yin Gong” 隱公, thus we know the “Gong” 公 here is Duke Yin. It happened in the Fourth Year of Duke Yin.

21 Original text see *Zuozhuan*, p. 35-36.

“traitors.” For example:

Prince Si sent traitors to kill Duke Xi at night, but used malaria to explain to the other lords. Duke Jian was born in the fifth year, they established him.

子駟使賊夜弑僖公，而以瘧疾赴于諸侯，簡公生五年，奉而立之。²²

This phenomenon shows that, the one who act the regicide action – the assassin – is not important, what matters in the author’s eyes is who planned it and what happened after this regicide. In other words, assassins are like a kind of tool. They killed a lord for another lord, but the record will only say a lord killed another. The assassins’ names, how they commit regicide, whether they are hired or self-employed, these are all not important.

In *Hanfeizi* 韓非子,²³ there is a famous sentence that goes “Scholars harass the law with their article, and the warriors violate the prohibition with their strengths, but the lords treat them both politely. This is why the state is in chaos ” 儒以文亂法，俠以武犯禁，而人主兼禮之，此所以亂也. Han Feizi uses a different word, “*xia*” 俠 in his book, rather than “*zei*” 賊 in *Zuozhuan*. To understand this sentence, we may first understand the “*ke*” 客 system in the Warring States period.

“*Ke*,” translated as “retainer,” is those kinds of men who lived in the lords’ manors and worked for them. They may not have any official status and some of them are even criminals escaped from other states, but they usually have skills in specific areas. The lords hire them, providing them food, houses, chariots, women and other luxuries. And when the lords need help, they are supposed to show their own skills. The most famous example of this system maybe Lord Mengchang 孟嘗君. In *Shiji*, it is recorded that:

Lord Mengchang lived in the city Xue. He gathered the retainers of other lords and the escaped criminals, and they all went to Lord Mengchang. Lord Mengchang treated them very well ignoring his family property. Because of this, he could attract all the knights in the world. There were thousands of retainers in his manor, no matter they

22 Original text see *Zuozhuan*, p. 953.

23 Wang Xianshen 王先慎, *Hanfeizi jijie* 韓非子集解 (Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2009), p. 449.

were from high or low social status, they were all treated equal as Wen²⁴ himself.

孟嘗君在薛，招致諸侯賓客及亡人有罪者，皆歸孟嘗君。孟嘗君舍業厚遇之，以故傾天下之士。食客數千人，無貴賤一與文等。²⁵

And in this chapter, it is also recorded a story that two retainers helped Lord Mengchang to escape from the Qin state. For the other three princes who were famous as Lord Mengchang in other states, they all had many retainers like this. With these retainers, the lords can not only protect themselves, but they also use their ability to change the politics sometimes. Just like *Shiji* recorded in “Weigongzi liezhuan” 魏公子列傳, Prince Wei, also known as Lord Xinling 信陵君, seized the military leadership with the help of two retainers:

The Prince bowed twice, and asked again. Scholar Hou²⁶ then let the others leave and secretly spoke... The Prince followed his plan, asked Concubine Ru for help. Concubine Ru indeed stole the commander's tally of Jin Bi²⁷ for the Prince... Reached Ye, the Prince lied he had the order from the King of Wei to replace Jin Bi. Jin Bi put the tallies together, suspected it, raised his hand and asked the Prince, saying: “Now I lead a hundred thousand troops, stationed on the border. This is an important mission of the state. Now you come with only one chariot to replace me, what does this mean?” He did not want to hear the order. Zhu Hai²⁸ hid an iron hammer, weight forty jin, in his sleeve, and killed Jin Bi with it. The Prince finally led the army of Jin Bi.

公子再拜，因問。侯生乃屏人閒語……公子從其計，請如姬。如姬果盜晉鄙兵符與公子……至鄴，矯魏王令代晉鄙。晉鄙合符，疑之，舉手視公子曰：“今吾擁十萬之眾，屯於境上，國之重任，今單車來代之，何如哉？”欲無聽。朱亥袖四十斤鐵椎，椎殺晉鄙，公子遂將晉鄙軍。²⁹

With this army, Prince Wei defeated the army of Qin, helped the Zhao state and changed the political situation.

The two retainers in the story of Prince Wei is also a good example about the sentence in *Hanfeizi*. In this story, we have the scholar – Scholar Hou, who gives the whole plan to help; and we have the warrior – Zhu Hai, who kills those who stand in the Prince's way. And

24 Wen is the name of Lord Mengchang. Here it means all the retainers live the same life as him to show Lord Mengchang treats them very well.

25 Original text see *Shiji*, p. 1847.

26 Scholar Hou 侯生, whose name is Hou Ying 侯嬴, is one of the Prince's retainers.

27 Jin Bi 晉鄙 is a general of Wei who is leading the army now. Here the Prince decide to take his army and lead them to help Zhao to defend Qin.

28 Zhu Hai 朱亥 is one of the Prince's retainers, recommended by Scholar Hou.

29 Original text see *Shiji*, p. 1865-1866.

we can imagine: if all the lords have these two kinds men working for them, all trying to change the politics into a way that would benefit to them, the state would be in chaos. What is more, having these dangerous warriors, even criminals, working for a lord is always a dangerous phenomenon. Tragedies like this may happen even under the worthy Lord Mengchang's leading:

Lord Mengchang past Zhao state, and Lord Pingyuan of Zhao treated him. People in Zhao heard that Lord Mengchang was worthy, so they all went out to watch him. They laughed and said: "Earlier, we thought Duke of Xue³⁰ was a tall and strong man. Now we see him, he is only a short guy." Lord Mengchang heard it, and burst with anger. He jumped down the chariot with his retainers, chopped and hit to kill hundreds of people, and finally destroyed the entire county and left.

孟嘗君過趙，趙平原君客之。趙人聞孟嘗君賢，出觀之，皆笑曰：“始以薛公為魁然也，今視之，乃眇小丈夫耳。”孟嘗君聞之，怒。客與俱者下，斫擊殺數百人，遂滅一縣以去。³¹

Only because someone laughed at him, Lord Mengchang destroyed the entire county with his retainers. In other words, with leading these armed warriors, lords could ignore the law of states. Thus, this is the “*ke*” system in the Warring States period: Lords hire skilled retainers to work for them, and with their help, lords are able to escaping from the danger, changing the political situation, and sometimes kill those who offend them or stand in their way.

And finally, let's turn to the word “*cike*” 刺客. This word is highly possible to be newly created one in the Han dynasty. This word is made up by two words, “*ci*” 刺, which means “stab,” and “*ke*” 客 as retainer like we mentioned before. Thus, *cike* is a part of the “*ke*” system; it represents a specific kind of retainer who assassinate the enemies for their lords. Doing this kind of dangerous work, all the *cike* are very brave and skilled warriors in that period. The changing of name from “*zei*” in *Zuo zhuan* to “*cike*” in the Han, also represents scholars begin to focus on this specific “assassin-retainers” group. Different from the other retainers, normally they will finish the job at the cost of their lives – they are both

30 Lord Mengchang's land is in Xue, thus here people call him Duke of Xue.

31 Original text see *Shiji*, p. 1848.

the killers and the victims of politics. The scholars begin to think about their reasons of doing these affairs – what makes them willing to use their lives to implement the assassination. In the carvings on the wall of Wu Liang Shrine, we can find six assassins, who are “Cao Mei”,³² “Zhuan Zhu”, “Jing Ke”, “Yao Li”, “Yu Rang” and “Nie Zheng.” These six assassins may be the best examples of assassins by Han scholars.

32 Recorded as “Cao Mo” 曹沫 in *Shiji* and “Cao Gui” 曹蒯 in *Zhanguoce*.

Chapter 2: Zhuan Zhu

Zhuan Zhu 專諸, also named Zhuan Shezhu 鱄設諸 in *Zuozhuan* 左傳,³³ was a famous assassin in the Wu state. He was entwined with narratives concerning the problem surrounding legitimate succession. Although stories have different plots, but the ending is always that Zhuan Zhu kills the King of Wu, Liao 僚, and causes the establishment of the King of Wu, Helü 闔閭.

Zhuan Zhu's name can be found in different historical records, and here in this chapter, I will provide the visions in *Shiji* 史記, *Wuyue chunqiu* 吳越春秋, and *Zuozhuan*. Firstly, I will translate the whole texts, then I will do some close reading, discuss the details of each text, and finally I will compare them together to see the shaping of Zhuan Zhu's image.

Shiji, also known as *Records of the Grand Historian*, is a monumental history book about ancient China and the world. It was written by Sima Qian 司馬遷(?145 B.C.E.-?86 B.C.E) in the Han Dynasty. *Shiji* is also believed to be the first history record in the style of biographies, and it provides a model for the later twenty-four history records in later periods. The whole book is divided into five parts, which are “Benji” 本紀 (Basic Annals), “Biao” 表 (Tables), “Shu” 書 (Treatises), “Shijia” 世家 (Hereditary Houses), and “Liezhu” 列傳 (Ranked Biographies). Most of Zhuan Zhu's story is the “Cike liezhu” 刺客列傳, translated as “The Biographies of the Assassins,” including five stories of the five famous assassins in the past hundreds of years. Besides, since the story happened in the Wu state, there is also some information in the “Wutaibo shijia” 吳太伯世家 and “Wuzixu liezhu” 伍子胥列傳. Here is my translation of the chapters related to Zhuan Zhu in *Shiji*:

³³ As for his name, in *Shiji* it uses “Zhuan Zhu” 專諸, but in *Hanshu*, it uses “Zhuan Zhu” 鱄諸. “Zhuan Shezhu” 鱄設諸 is the one in *Zuozhuan*. This kind of phenomenon is very common in the name of people in pre-Qin resources, and normally we can figure out they are the same person by their affairs.

*Translation of Shiji:*The Biographies of the Assassins³⁴

A hundred and sixty seven years after that, there was Zhuan Zhu's affair in the Wu state.

As for Zhuan Zhu, he was the person from city Tang of Wu.³⁵ When Wu Zixu escaped from Chu and entered Wu, he learnt about Zhuan Zhu's ability. After Wu Zixu met with the King of Wu, Liao,³⁶ he tried to persuade the king with the benefit of attacking Chu. The Prince Guang of Wu said: "That Wu Yuan's³⁷ father and brothers were all killed by Chu. That he talks about attacking Chu is because he desires taking his personal revenge. It cannot be for the sake of Wu." The King of Wu thus stopped.

Wu Zixu knew that Prince Guang wanted to kill the King of Wu, Liao, and said: "That Guang³⁸ likely has ambition inside the state; I cannot yet persuade him of affairs outside." Thus he presented Zhuan Zhu to Prince Guang.

The father of Guang is called the King of Wu, Zhufan. Zhufan had three younger brothers; the first one is called Yuzhai, the next one Yimo and the next one Jizi Zha.³⁹ Zhufan

34 My translation of this biography mainly adapted from William H. Nienhauser, Jr.'s *The Grand Scribe's Records* (Indiana University Press, 1994).

35 Here I translate the word 堂邑 as "city Tang" since the word "yi" 邑 has the meaning of city. However, in the footnote of Shiji in page 1960, it argues there is "Tangyi Xian" 堂邑县, Tangyi county, in Han. Considering the background of this story is in the Spring and Autumn Annals, I still tend to use "city Tang."

36 In the word "Wuwang Liao" 吳王僚, "Wuwang" is his title and "Liao" is his name. Thus I translate it as "the King of Wu, Liao." In that period, Wu is still considered to be the "barbarian," and the title of their rulers is different from other "civilized" states.

37 "Yuan" 員 is the name of Wu Zixu and Zixu is the styled one. Here Prince Guang uses this name to mention him means the sentence is very rude.

38 The same as Prince Guang, Wu Zixu uses his name, "Guang" 光, rudely to repay his impoliteness before. This detail can show that Wu Zixu is the kind of man who is very vindictive and it may also suggest that Wu Zixu's attacking Chu is really taking his personal revenge, just like Prince Guang analyzes. But on the other hand, they two do understand each other very well.

39 As for these brothers, their names also have different versions in different resources just like Zhuan Zhu's name. But the affair of they pass the throne to younger brothers in order is

knew that Jizi Zha was worthy so he did not established a crown prince, but passed the throne to his three younger brothers according to order, wanting to finally give the state to Jizi Zha. After Zhufan died, the throne was passed on to Yuzhai. When Yuzhai died, it was passed on to Yimo. When Yimo died, it should have been passed on to Jizi Zha. Jizi Zha escaped and didn't want to be established.⁴⁰ Then the people in Wu established Yimo's son Liao as the king. Prince Guang said: "If we follow the brothers' order, then Master Ji⁴¹ should be established. If we must make the son as the heir, then I am the real heir born of the queen, and I should be established." Thus he secretly hired retainers, seeking to be established.

After Prince Guang obtained Zhuan Zhu, he treated him well as a valuable retainer. In the Ninth Year,⁴² King Ping of Chu⁴³ died. In the spring, the King of Wu, Liao, wanted to take advantage of the fact that Chu was in mourning and sent his two young brothers – Princes Gaiyu and Shuyong leading the army to surround Qian of Chu. He also sent Master Ji of Yanling⁴⁴ to Jin state in order to watch the lords' reactions. Chu sent out their army and

the same. Jizi Zha 季子札 is always the youngest one. I believe the word "ji" 季 has the meaning of he is the youngest. And his personal name is "Zha" 札. So Jizi Zha literally means "the youngest son, Zha."

40 "Escaping and don't want to be established" is to show that Jizi Zha is worthy and modest. In some other resources, such as *Zuozhuan*, it claims Jizi Zha was happened to being a messenger at that time, thus he was not in the state and could not be established. This will not change the result, but have some effect on the image of Jizi Zha.

41 Here Prince Guang uses the word "Jizi" 季子. I translate it as "Master Ji" rather than "the youngest son" to show the respect of Guang. The word "zi" 子 has the meaning of respect such as "Kongzi" 孔子 and "Mengzi" 孟子. So I tend to translate Jizi like Mengzi, since Ji and Meng both have the meaning of sons order – Meng means the oldest son but not from the wife. Thus I believe translate Jizi to Master Ji is reasonable.

42 Here "jiu nian" 九年 (the Ninth Year) means the ninth year for Liao to be the king. However in the "Wutaibo Shijia" chapter, it recorded to be "shier nian" 十二年 (the Twelfth Year). In the "Shier zhuhou nianbiao" 十二諸侯年表 (the Table of Twelve Lords) it shows King Zhao of Chu was established in the Thirteenth Year in Chu, which is the Eleventh Year in Wu. The time line of "Shier zhuhou nianbiao" and *Zuozhuan* are the same, while the "Wutaibo shijia" and *Wuyuechunqiu* are the same. It is very hard to figure out which one is correct, and here I just follow the original text to translate it.

43 "Chu Ping Wang" 楚平王, translated as "King Ping of Chu," is in the form of rulers' title of "civilized" states. Here I want to show the form is different from the kings in Wu.

44 "Yanling" 延陵 maybe the manor of Jizi Zha, so he is also called "Master Ji of Yanling"

cut off Wu generals Gaiyu and Shuyong from behind, thus the Wu troops could not return.

Thereupon, Prince Guang told Zhuan Zhu saying: “This opportune moment should not be lost, and if we do not seek, what will we gain! Moreover, I, Guang, am the real heir of the old king and should be enthroned. Even if Master Ji comes back, he will not depose me.”

Zhuan Zhu said: “King Liao can be killed! His mother is old and his sons are too young, and his two young brothers are all leading troops to attack Chu. Chu has already cut off their back. Now Wu is having a hard time abroad due to Chu, and within the court is empty without a minister who has a backbone. Indeed there is nothing they can do to me.”⁴⁵

Prince Guang knocked his head on the floor and said: “My body is your body!”⁴⁶

On the thirteenth Day of the forth month⁴⁷, Guang hid his armed men in the cellar, prepared a banquet and invited King Liao. King Liao sent his troops to line in the path from the palace to Guang’s house. At the gates and doors, on the stairs and steps, to the left and right, were all King Liao’s trusted men. Standing on both sides and serving the king,⁴⁸ all of them held long swords.⁴⁹ At the height of banquet, Prince Guang pretended to have the foot pain, entered the cellar, and had Zhuan Zhu put a dagger in the belly of a braised fish⁵⁰ and presented it to the king.

延陵季子。

45 As for the word “wo” 我 here, it can both be translated as “me,” Zhuan Zhu, and “us,” Zhuan Zhu and Guang. Considering it is Zhuan Zhu showing what he can do now to Prince Guang, I believe it should be “there is nothing they can do me” to show his ability.

46 I literally translate this sentence to “my body is your body.” In Chinese, it has two meanings. On one hand, it means “I can only rely on you.” And on the other hand, it can also means “your body is just like mine,” which imply that after Zhuan Zhu’s death, Prince Guang will look after his family.

47 “Bingzi” 丙子 means “thirteen” in ancient Chinese counting.

48 Here Sima Qian uses the word “*jialishi*” 夾立侍 to describe these men. Personally, these are three words: “*jia*” 夾 means on both sides; “*li*” 立 means they are standing; and “*shi*” 侍 means their duty is to serve the king. Thus I translate it as “standing on both sides and serving the king.”

49 The word “*pi*” 鉞 means a kind of short blade which has two edges. But here it is “*changpi*” 長鉞, so I translate it as “long swords” to show the length and “two edges.”

50 The word “*zhi*” 炙 means cooked or roasted meat. Thus here I translate the word “*yuzhi*” 魚炙 as “a braised fish.”

When he arrived before the king, Zhuan Zhu tore the fish open, and there upon stabbed King Liao with the dagger. King Liao died immediately. His retainers also killed Zhuan Zhu. All the king's men were in chaos. Prince Guang sent out his hidden armed troops to attack king's men, and killed all of them. Thus he enthroned himself, and he became King Helü. Helü then enfeoffed Zhuan Zhu's son and made him as high minister.⁵¹

Original Texts:

其後百六十有七年而吳有專諸之事。

專諸者，吳堂邑人也。伍子胥之亡楚而如吳也，知專諸之能。伍子胥既見吳王僚，說以伐楚之利。吳公子光曰：“彼伍員父兄皆死於楚，而員言伐楚，欲自為報私讎也，非能為吳。”吳王乃止。伍子胥知公子光之欲殺吳王僚，乃曰：“彼光將有內志，未可說以外事。”乃進專諸於公子光。

光之父曰吳王諸樊。諸樊弟三人：次曰餘祭，次曰夷昧，次曰季子札。諸樊知季子札賢而不立太子，以次傳三弟，欲卒致國于季子札。諸樊既死，傳餘祭。餘祭死，傳夷昧。夷昧死，當傳季子札；季子札逃不肯立，吳人乃立夷昧之子僚為王。公子光曰：“使以兄弟次邪，季子當立；必以子乎，則光真適嗣，當立。”故嘗陰養謀臣以求立。

光既得專諸，善客待之。九年而楚平王死。春，吳王僚欲因楚喪，使其二弟公子蓋餘、屬庸將兵圍楚之濫；使延陵季子於晉，以觀諸侯之變。楚發兵絕吳將蓋餘、屬庸路，吳兵不得還。於是公子光謂專諸曰：“此時不可失，不求何獲！且光真王嗣，當立，季子雖來，不吾廢也。”專諸曰：“王僚可殺也。母老子弱，而兩弟將兵伐楚，楚絕其後。方今吳外困於楚，而內空無骨鯁之臣，是無如我何。”公子光頓首曰：“光之身，子之身也。”

四月丙子，光伏甲士於窟室中，而具酒請王僚。王僚使兵陳自宮至光之家，門戶階陛左右，皆王僚之親戚也。夾立侍，皆持長鉞。酒既酣，公子光詳為足疾，入窟室中，使專諸置匕首魚炙之腹中而進之。既至王前，專諸擘魚，因以匕首刺王僚，王僚立死。左右亦殺專諸，王人擾亂。公子光出其伏甲以攻王僚之徒，盡滅之，遂自立為王，是為闔閭。闔閭乃封專諸之子以為上卿。

51 To translate the title “*shangqing*” 上卿, I consult Charles O. Hucker's *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford University Press, 1985). And also considering the fact that it is more like an honorary title and the imperial title system is still not completed in the Spring and Autumn Annals, I believe “high minister” is proper.

Translation of Shiji:

The Hereditary House of Wutaibo

When Wu Zixu escaped to the Wu state at the beginning, he tried to persuade the King of Wu, Liao, with the benefit of attacking Chu. Prince Guang said: “Xu’s⁵² father and brothers were killed by Chu, and he just want to take his personal revenge. I do not see any benefit.” From this, Wu Yuan learned that he had other ambitions.⁵³ Thus he looked for a brave man named Zhuan Zhu and presented him to Guang. Guang was pleased and treated Wu Zixu as a guest. Zixu retired to plow in the field, waiting for Zhuan Zhu’s affair.⁵⁴

In the winter of the twelfth year⁵⁵, King Ping of Chu died. In the spring of thirteenth year, the state of Wu wanted to take advantage of the fact that Chu was mourning and attack it. It sent Princes Gai Yu and Zhu Yong who raised their army to surround Liu and Qian of Chu. It also sent Jizha to Jin state to watch the reaction of other lords. Chu sent their army to cut off the troops of Wu from behind. The army of Wu could not return.

At this moment, Prince Guang of Wu said: “This opportunity cannot be lost.” He told Zhuan Zhu saying: “If one does not seek, what will one gain! I am the real heir of the old king, and I should be established. I want to seek for it. Even if Master Ji comes, he will not depose me.”

Zhuan Zhu said: “King Liao can be killed. His mother is old and his sons are young, and the two princes are leading the army to attack Chu. Chu has already cut off their path. Now Wu is having a hard time abroad due to Chu, and within the court is empty without a minister who has a backbone. Indeed there is nothing they can do to us.”

52 Interestingly here Prince Guang does not speak rudely like in “Cike liezhuan.” Maybe this is because here does not have Wu Zixu’s analysis so it is unnecessary to have that detail.

53 Here we can see Wu Zixu notice Prince Guang’s ambition from his words. While in “Cike liezhuan,” it does not show this point. This phenomenon is common in *Shiji*, to put the details in different chapters’ description of the same affair.

54 Here adds a detail about Wu Zixu’s action after presenting Zhuan Zhu, while in “Cike liezhuan,” he “despairs” after Zhuan Zhu comes on the stage.

55 Still here I simply follow the text to translate the time.

Guang said: “My body is your body!”

On the thirteenth Day of the fourth month, Guang hid his armed men in the cellar, and then invited King Liao to come and drink. King Liao sent the troops to line the path from the palace to Guang’s home. At the gates and stairs and beside windows and mats were all King Liao’s men. All men standing on both sides were holding the long swords.⁵⁶ Prince Guang pretended to have the foot pain, entered the cellar, and had Zhuan Zhu put a dagger in a braised fish and presented it. Zhuan Zhu grabbed hold of the dagger and stabbed King Liao. As the long swords stabbed crossed his chest,⁵⁷ he already killed King Liao.⁵⁸ Prince Guang finally established himself as the king to replace Liao. He became King of Wu, Hel ü⁵⁹ Hel ü then made Zhuan Zhu’s son a minister.

Master Ji arrived, said: “If the old kings’ sacrifice not abandoned, the people’s government not abandoned, the gods are served,⁶⁰ and then he is my king. Who will I resent? I mourn for the dead and serve the lived one, in order to wait for the heaven’s order. It is not me who throw into disorder, and for the one established I will follow. This is the way of old men.” He reported his job, cried at Liao’s tomb, and returned to his position to serve. As for Prince Zhu Yong and Gai Yu of Wu, those who lead the troops but surrounded by Chu, they heard that Prince Guang killed Liao and established himself, and then they surrender to Chu

56 Here the description is “*ren jia chi pi*” 人夾持鉞, which is a very strange phrase. From the “Cike liezhuan” we can get a better sentence to show this sense. Thus I believe this phrase may be shortened from “*jiali*” 夾立 and “*chi changpi*” 持長鉞. So I translate it following these two phrase.

57 This detail is not shown in “Cike liezhuan.” Here “*xiong*” 匈 means the chest.

58 Here we have the word “*sui*” 遂, and I translate it as “already.” I want to show that all these actions happen in a very short time. When the guards notice the danger and attack Zhuan Zhu, he already successfully stabs the King.

59 The same as “Wuwang Liao”, I translate “Wuwang Helü” as “the King of Wu, Helü” to show the titles in Wu are different from those in other states.

60 As for the word “*sheji*” 社稷, in today’s China it means “the society” or “the country.” But here I believe it is the original meaning – “*she*” 社 means “the god of land” and “*ji*” 稷 means “the god of grain.” So “*sheji*” represents the gods of farming. Thus I translate the sentence “*sheji you feng*” 社稷有奉 as “the gods are served.”

with their army. Chu conferred them the city of Shu.

Original Texts:

伍子胥之初奔吳，說吳王僚以伐楚之利。公子光曰：“胥之父兄為僇於楚，欲自報其仇耳。未見其利。”於是伍員知光有他志，乃求勇士專諸，見之光。光喜，乃客伍子胥。子胥退而耕於野，以待專諸之事。

十二年冬，楚平王卒。十三年春，吳欲因楚喪而伐之，使公子蓋餘、燭庸以兵圍楚之六、濞。使季札於晉，以觀諸侯之變。楚發兵絕吳兵後，吳兵不得還。

於是吳公子光曰：“此時不可失也。”告專諸曰：“不索何獲！我真王嗣，當立，吾欲求之。季子雖至，不吾廢也。”

專諸曰：“王僚可殺也。母老子弱，而兩公子將兵攻楚，楚絕其路。方今吳外困於楚，而內空無骨鯁之臣，是無柰我何。”光曰：“我身，子之身也。”

四月丙子，光伏甲士於窟室，而謁王僚飲。王僚使兵陳於道，自王宮至光之家，門階戶席，皆王僚之親也，人夾持鉞。公子光詳為足疾，入于窟室，使專諸置匕首於炙魚之中以進食。手匕首刺王僚，鉞交於匈，遂弑王僚。公子光竟代立為王，是為吳王闔廬。闔廬乃以專諸子為卿。

季子至，曰：“苟先君無廢祀，民人無廢主，社稷有奉，乃吾君也。吾敢誰怨乎？哀死事生，以待天命。非我生亂，立者從之，先人之道也。”復命，哭僚墓，復位而待。吳公子燭庸、蓋餘二人將兵遇圍於楚者，聞公子光弑王僚自立，乃以其兵降楚，楚封之於舒。

Translation of Shiji:

The Biography of Wu Zixu

After a while, King Ping of Chu grew angry because his border city Zhongli and the border city of Wu, Beiliangshi,⁶¹ both cultivated silkworms, and two women attacked each other for the mulberry. The affair became serious to the degree that the two states attacked each other with their troops. Wu sent Prince Guang to attack Chu, took their Zhongli and Juchao and returned. Wu Zixu tried to persuade the King of Wu, Liao, said: “Chu can be

61 “*Bianyi*” 邊邑 means the city at border. Although “Beiliangshi” 卑梁氏 looks like a kind of family name, here it should be the name of a city in the Wu state.

destroyed. Please send Prince Guang again.”

Prince Guang told the King of Wu saying: “That Wu Xu,⁶² his father and brothers were killed by Chu, so he exhorts you to attack Chu because he wants to take his personal revenge. An expedition to Chu cannot yet destroy it.”

Wu Xu learnt that Prince Guang had ambition inside the state that, he wanted to kill the king and establish himself, and could not be persuaded with affairs outside. Thus he presented Zhuan Zhu to Prince Guang, and retired to plow in the field with the son of Crown Prince Jian, Sheng.

In the Fifth year,⁶³ King Ping of Chu died. Earlier, woman of Qin, who King Ping took from Crown Prince Jian, bore a son named Zhen. When King Ping died, Zhen was finally established as his heir. He was King Zhao. The King of Wu, Liao, wanted to take advantage of the fact that Chu was in mourning, sent two princes leading the army to attack Chu. Chu sent the army to cut off Wu troops from behind, so they could not return. The state of Wu was empty inside, thus Prince Guang ordered Zhuan Zhu to assassinate the King of Wu, Liao, and established himself. This was the King of Wu, Helü.

When Helü was already established, and fulfilled his ambition, he called Wu Yuan to made him an Envoy,⁶⁴ and consider the state’s affair with him.

Original Texts:

62 “Wu Xu” is also the name of Wu Zixu. “Zi” 子 is like a kind of word to show the respect. In this chapter, “Wu zixu liezhuan,” Sima Qian uses the name “Wu Xu” and “Wu Zixu” together. Normally, in the plots about him being the general in Wu, it will use “Wu Zixu” and in the plots about his early periods, it will use “Wu Xu.”

63 Again, the time line looks in chaos. I just follow the original text, and it is highly possible for this “the fifth year” means “the fifth year of King Jing of Zhou” according to “Shier zhuhou nianbiao.” Since Wu Zixu escapes from Chu to Wu, using the local way of numbering years while doing the recording may cause confused. Thus using the year number of Zhou 周, which is still the highest ruler in name, is reasonable.

64 After consulting Charles O. Hucker’s *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, “xingren” 行人 may be translated as “messenger.” However this will be confused with “shi” 使, which also means messenger. Thus I choose “Envoy,” and this title means the ministers who handle the affairs with other states.

久之，楚平王以其邊邑鐘離與吳邊邑卑梁氏俱蠶，兩女子爭桑相攻，乃大怒，至於兩國舉兵相伐。吳使公子光伐楚，拔其鐘離、居巢而歸。伍子胥說吳王僚曰：“楚可破也。願復遣公子光。”

公子光謂吳王曰：“彼伍胥父兄為戮於楚，而勸王伐楚者，欲以自報其讎耳。伐楚未可破也。”

伍胥知公子光有內志，欲殺王而自立，未可說以外事，乃進專諸於公子光，退而與太子建之子勝耕於野。

五年而楚平王卒。初，平王所奪太子建秦女生子軫，及平王卒，軫竟立為後，是為昭王。吳王僚因楚喪，使二公子將兵往襲楚。楚發兵絕吳兵之後，不得歸。吳國內空，而公子光乃令專諸襲刺吳王僚而自立，是為吳王闔廬。闔廬既立，得志，乃召伍員以為行人，而與謀國事。

*Wuyue chunqiu*⁶⁵ was written by Zhao Ye 趙曄 in the Han dynasty. Different from *Shiji*, this book only focuses on the history of the Wuyue area. It spends five chapters on the history of Wu, and five chapters on the one of Yue. At the same time, since it focuses on one area, *Wuyue chunqiu* provides more detailed stories comparing with *Shiji*. The story of Zhuan Zhu is in the chapter “Wang Liao Shi Gongzi Guang Zhuan” 王僚使公子光傳, the title may come from the first sentence of this chapter, “King Liao sent Prince Guang to attack Chu” 王僚使公子光伐楚. The chapter is divided into six parts by the years, and Zhuan Zhu appears in the part “the fifth year” and “the thirteenth year.” Here is my translation about these two parts:

Translation of Wuyue chunqiu:

The Biography of “King Liao sent Prince Guang,” The Fifth Year

Zixu returned to plow in the field, seeking for a brave warrior to present to Prince Guang, wanting to ingratiate himself. Then he obtained the brave warrior Zhuan Zhu.

65 Zhou Shengchun 周生春, *Wuyue chunqiu jijiao huikao* 吳越春秋輯校匯考 (Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1997).

As for Zhuan Zhu, he was a man from the city Tang.⁶⁶ When Wu Xu escaped from Chu and entered Wu, he met Zhuan Zhu on his way. Zhuan Zhu was just fighting with others, and was about to attack his enemy. His anger could compare with ten thousands men,⁶⁷ and could not be matched.⁶⁸ But when his wife called him, he immediately returned.

Zixu thought it is strange and asked him about it: “Why even when you, sir,⁶⁹ are very angry, upon hearing a woman’s call you would return. Do you have any explanations?”

Zhuan Zhu said: “Take a look at my posture, do I look like an idiot? Why do you speak of me so lowly? As for those who bow for one, they will surely stand above ten thousands.”

Zixu then evaluated his appearance: his forehead high as pestle and his eyes were deep;⁷⁰ he has the tiger’s breast and the bear’s back;⁷¹ the whole appearance made him looked even hard to follow.⁷² Wu Zixu learnt he was a brave warrior, and secretly made friend with him, wanting Zhuan Zhu to work for him. Now meeting Prince Guang had a plan,

66 According to the footnotes of *Shiji* in page 1233, it claims *Wuyue chunqiu* recorded Zhuan Zhu’s hometown is “Fengyi” 豐邑. However in today’s *Wuyue chunqiu*, it is also “Tangyi” 堂邑. This detail shows the *Wuyue chunqiu* in the Han dynasty have some difference from the one we read today.

67 This sentence means Zhuan Zhu’s anger is as terrible as ten thousands men to be anger together, and it is very hard to show that in English. Thus I just translate it literally.

68 The phrase “*dang*” 當 has two meanings. It can mean “block” or “match.” Thus this sentence can be “it (Zhuan Zhu’s anger) cannot be blocked” or “it cannot be matched.” Both two of them can make sense. Here I tend to use “cannot be matched” since later his wife successfully “blocks” it.

69 Here Wu Zixu uses the word “*fuzi*” 夫子 to call him while talking with Zhuan Zhu. This shows his respect, and I translate it as “you, sir” to show it.

70 In the footnote of *Shiji* (p. 1233), it is “*xionghao*” 雄貌 here rather than “*duisang*” 確顙. Zhou Shengchun also points in *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽, it is “*tui*” 推 rather than “*dui*” 確. Here I still follow “*duisang*” since it describes Zhuan Zhu’s forehead, and reasonable to talk about his eyes in next phrase.

71 According to the footnote in *Shiji* (p. 1233), the description of Zhuan Zhu here is “*chikou*” 侈口, which means big mouth, rather than “*huyin*” 虎膺. Zhou Shengchun also mentions in *Taiping yulan* it is “*hukou*” 虎口, tiger’s mouth. Considering the later word is “*xiongbai*” 熊背, I believe “*huyin*” is more suitable here. Both “*hu*” (tiger) and “*xiong*” (bear) are strong animals, and “*yin*” 膺 means chest while “*bei*” 背 is back.

72 This phrase “*li yu cong nan*” 戾於從難 cannot be found in the quotation of *Wuyue chunqiu* in *Shiji*’s footnote (p. 1233). The word “*li*” 戾 means “fierce” and this phrase means Zhuan Zhu’s appearance make him look like a very fierce man and seems hard to get along with.

Wu Zixu then presented him to Prince Guang.

Prince Guang had already gotten Zhuan Zhu and he treated him with politeness. Prince Guang said: “It is the Heaven that let you, sir, help me who has lost the root.”⁷³

Zhuan Zhu said: “When the old king Yumo died, it is Liao’s destiny to be established. Why do you, my prince, want to harm him?”

Guang said: “The old king Shoumeng had four sons: the eldest one was named Zhufan, and he was my father. The next one was called Yuzhai, the one after him, Yumo, and the last one Ji Zha. Zha was worthy, thus when the old king was about to die; he ordered that the throne be passed from brother to brother,⁷⁴ and to pass it to Ji Zha. Considering at that time, Ji Zha was sent as a messenger to other lords and not returned. Yumo died, the state was empty. If one is to be established, then it should follow primogeniture.⁷⁵ As for the heir of the eldest son,⁷⁶ that should be me. Now how can Liao be established instead of me? My power is weak without any help. Thus while doing things, only a strong man can realize my ambition. Although I will be established in his stead, even if Master Ji returns from East, he will not dispose me.”

Zhuan Zhu said: “Why don’t you sent some close ministers to gently discuss this beside the king, present the order of the old king, to let him know the meaning and to whom throne belongs. Is it necessary to prepare the swordsmen secretly, and abandon the old king’s virtue?”

73 Here I literally translate “*shi gen*” 失根 as “lose the root.” This phrase means Prince Guang describe himself helpless, like a tree loses its root. And now Zhuan Zhu comes to help, which is very necessary for him.

74 Here the author uses the word “*shizhang*” 適長. Here “*shi*” 適 is the same as “*di*” 嫡, which means the son from the wife. Thus “*shizhang*” means the eldest son of wife. In this sentence, this means the king, Shoumeng, past the throne to his eldest son from wife – Zhufan, and wanted the throne finally past to Ji Zha. Thus I add the phrase “from brother to brother” here to make it clear.

75 About this sentence, literally it will be “the one to be established must be the eldest son of the queen.” So I translate it as “follow primogeniture” to make it simple.

76 “*Shizhang zhi hou*” 適長之後, means the son of the “*shizhang*,” Zhufan, which represents Prince Guang. Thus I translate it as “the heir of the eldest son.”

Guang said: “Liao was always greedy and relies on power. He only knows the benefit of advancing, but not mindful of making a concession. Thus I am seeking for knights who can have the same worry and want to work together with them. Sir, please carefully consider this intention.”

Zhuan Zhu said: “Your words are too explicit, what does that mean by a prince?”

Guang said: “No, these are the words for the state. For those petty men they cannot follow, I will only give the order.”

Zhuan Zhu said: “My prince, please give the order.”⁷⁷

Prince Guang said: “It is still not the time.”

Zhuan Zhu said: “As for those who want to kill a king, they must know what they are fond of first. What does the King of Wu love?”

Guang said: “He loves food.” Zhuan Zhu asked: “What kind of food is his favorite?”

Guang said: “He loves the braised of fish.”

Zhuan Zhu then left, went to Tai Hu to learn how to braise fish. After three months, he nailed the flavor. He then waited at ease⁷⁸ for the prince’s order.

Original Text:

子胥退耕於野，求勇士薦之公子光，欲以自媚。乃得勇士專諸。

專諸者，堂邑人也。伍胥之亡楚如吳時，遇之於途。專諸方與人鬥，將就敵，其怒有萬人之氣，甚不可當。其妻一呼即還。

子胥怪而問其狀：“何夫子之怒盛也，聞一女子之聲而折道，寧有說乎？”專諸曰：“子視吾之儀，寧類愚者也？何言之鄙也？夫屈一人之下，必伸萬人之上。”

子胥因相其貌：確顴而深目，虎膺而熊背，戾於從難。知其勇士，陰而結之，欲

77 During this dialog, Prince Guang is trying to persuade Zhuan Zhu to kill Liao for him. Zhuan Zhu already understands the meaning, but his word means “I am a petty man and the only thing I do is follow your order.” This shows his modest. Also Prince Guang understands Zhuan Zhu will help him, and gives the order.

78 Here the word is “*anzuo*” 安坐, which means “sit comfortably.” This sentence means Zhuan Zhu is now all prepared and only wait for the suitable time. Thus I translate it as “wait at ease” to show his confidence and well-prepared.

以為用。遭公子光之有謀也，而進之公子光。

光既得專諸而禮待之。公子光曰：“天以夫子輔孤之失根也。”專諸曰：“前王餘昧卒，僚立自其分也。公子何因而欲害之乎？”

光曰：“前君壽夢有子四人：長曰諸樊，則光之父也；次曰餘祭；次曰餘昧；次曰季札。札之賢也，將卒，傳付適長，以及季札。念季札為使亡在諸侯未還，餘昧卒，國空，有立者適長也，適長之後，即光之身也。今僚何以當代立乎？吾力弱無助，於掌事之間，非用有力徒能安吾志。吾雖代立，季子東還，不吾廢也。”

專諸曰：“何不使近臣從容言於王側，陳前王之命，以諷其意，令知國之所歸。何須私備劍士，以捐先王之德？”光曰：“僚素貪而恃力，知進之利，不睹退讓。吾故求同憂之士，欲與之并力。惟夫子諗斯義也。”

專諸曰：“君言甚露乎，於公子何意也？”光曰：“不也，此社稷之言也，小人不能奉行，惟委命矣。”專諸曰：“願公子命之。”公子光曰：“時未可也。”

專諸曰：“凡欲殺人君，必前求其所好。吳王何好？”光曰：“好味。”專諸曰：“何味所甘？”光曰：“好嗜魚之炙也。”

專諸乃去，從太湖學炙魚，三月得其味，安坐待公子命之。

Translation of Wuyue chunqiu:

The Biography of “King Liao sent Prince Guang,” The Thirteenth Year

In the thirteenth year, spring, Wu wanted to take advantage of the fact that Chu was in mourning and attack it. Wu sent princes Gaiyu and Zhuyong to lead the troops to surrounded Chu. It also sent Ji Zha to Jin state, in order to watch the reaction of other lords. Chu sent their army and cut off the troops of Wu from behind. The army of Wu could not return. There upon Prince Guang's heart moved.⁷⁹

Wu Xu knew Guang saw this opportunity, thus he persuaded Guang saying: “Now the King of Wu attacks Chu, his two younger brothers are leading the troops – we cannot know their end yet. The affair of Zhuan Zhu is urgent now. This chance will not come again, you

79 The phrase “*xindong*” 心動 means this opportunity is very attractive, and Prince Guang is moved. This kind of “*xindong*” phenomenon is very common in the Chinese history record, normally used while one suddenly have some feeling or presentiment, knowing it is the chance or something important will happen. Here I translate it simply as “heart moved.”

should not lose it.”

There upon the Prince had an audience with Zhuan Zhu and said: “Now Liao’s two younger brothers are attacking Chu, and Master Ji hasn’t returned. At this opportunity, what will we gain if we don’t seek? What is more, I, Guang, am the real heir of the old king.”

Zhuan Zhu said: “Liao can be killed. His mother is old and his son is young. His brothers attacked Chu and Chu cut off their way behind. Now upon, Wu is having a hard time abroad due to Chu and in the court lacks a minister who has a backbone. Indeed there is nothing they can do on me.”

In the fourth month, Prince Guang hid the armed men in the cellar and prepared a banquet to invite King Liao. Liao spoke to his mother saying: “Prince Guang prepared a banquet for me and came to invite me. Was there anything he wants to do?” His mother said: “Guang has high ambition and shows expressions of hatred in his face from time to time. You can’t be careless.”

King Liao then wore three layers of Tangyi⁸⁰ armors and arranged solders to guard on the street. From the gate of the palace to the gate of Guang’s house, at both sides of the stairs and mats were all King Liao’s confidants. Those who served standing beside the seats were all holding long halberds.⁸¹ At the height of banquet, Prince Guang pretended he had a foot pain, entered the cellar to dress his foot. He sent Zhuan Zhu to put the Yuchang sword⁸² in the braised fish to present it.

Already arrived in front of King Liao, Zhuan Zhu then tired the braised fish, and there

80 “Tangyi” 棠鋌 is highly possible to be the name of a kind of armor – maybe a kind of fitting armor next one’s skin. Zhou Shengchun points out that here “yi” 鋌 means “iron” (p. 37).

81 “Ji” 戟 is a kind of weapon which combines spear and axe, which can both stab and cut. Thus I believe “halberd” is very close to that.

82 “Yuchang” 魚腸 is the name of this sword. This name literally means “fish intestine.” The name shows the sword is small enough to put in the fish’s belly. In *Yuejueshu* 越絕書, it mentions this is a very famous sword made by the famous craftsman Master Ouyé 歐冶子.

upon push the dagger. The crossed halberds stabbed in Zhuan Zhu's breast, his breast and chest were cut open but the dagger did not stop and stabbed King Liao. The dagger cross the armor until the King's back. King Liao had already died and the retainers also killed Zhuan Zhu together. All men were in chaos. Prince Guang sent out his hidden armed men to attack Liao's men and killed all of them. Thus he enthroned himself, and this became the King of Wu, Hel ü. Then he enfeoffed Zhuan Zhu's son, and made him a guest minister.⁸³

When Ji Zha returned from being a messenger and entered Wu, Hel ü gave his throne to him. Ji Zha said: "If the old kings not abandoned and the gods are served, then he is the king. Who will I resent? I mourn for the dead and serve the living one, in order to wait for the heaven's order. It is not me who throw into disorder, and for the one established I will follow. This is the way of old men." He ordered to cry⁸⁴ at Liao's tomb, and returned to his position to serve.

As for princes Gaiyu and Zhuyong, the two men who lead the army and be surrounded in Chu, after hearing Prince Guang killed King Liao and established himself, they lead the army to surrender to Chu. Chu then confer them the city of Shu.

Original Text:

十三年，春，吳欲因楚葬而伐之，使公子蓋餘、燭傭以兵圍楚，使季札於晉，以觀諸侯之變。楚發兵絕吳後，吳兵不得還。於是公子光心動。

伍胥知光之見機也，乃說光曰：“今吳王伐楚，二弟將兵，未知吉凶，專諸之事於斯急矣。時不再來，不可失也。”

於是公子見專諸曰：“今二弟伐楚，季子未還，當此之時，不求何獲？時不可失。且光真王嗣也。”專諸曰：“僚可殺也，母老子弱，弟伐楚，楚絕其後。方今吳外困於楚，

83 Here the title is “*keqing*” 客卿 rather than the “*shangqing*” in *Shiji*. Thus I also change the translation to “guest minister.”

84 Here the phrase is “*ming ku Liao mu*” 命哭僚墓, which looks like Ji Zha orders someone (maybe Hel ü?) to cry together. Zhou Shengchun points it strange and mentions in *Shiji*, it is “*fuming, ku Liao mu*” 復命, 哭僚墓, just like we translate before in *Shiji* part. Personally “*fuming*” one is more reasonable but I still put this one here to show a different version. In this one, Ji Zha behaves stronger.

內無骨鯁之臣，是無如我何也。”

四月，公子光伏甲士於窟室中，具酒而請王僚。僚白其母，曰：“公子光為我具酒來請，期無變悉乎？”母曰：“光心氣怏怏，常有愧恨之色，不可不慎。”

王僚乃被棠鍔之甲三重，使兵衛陳於道，自宮門至於光家之門，階席左右皆王僚之親戚，使坐立侍，皆操長戟交軼。酒酣，公子光佯為足疾，入窟室裹足，使專諸置魚腸劍炙魚中進之。

既至王僚前，專諸乃擘炙魚，因推匕首，立戟交軼倚專諸胸，胸斷臆開，匕首如故，以刺王僚，貫甲達背，王僚既死，左右共殺專諸，眾士擾動，公子光伏其甲士以攻僚眾，盡滅之。遂自立，是為吳王闔閭也。乃封專諸之子，拜為客卿。

季札使還至吳，闔閭以位讓，季札曰：“苟前君無廢，社稷以奉，君也。吾誰怨乎？哀死待生，以俟天命。非我所亂，立者從之，是前人之道。”命哭僚墓，復位而待。

公子蓋餘、燭庸二人將兵遇圍於楚者，聞公子光殺王僚自立，乃以兵降楚，楚封之於舒。

The last resource I want to mention here is *Zuozhuan*. *Zuozhuan*, also known as *The Zuo Tradition*, is a historical record about Spring and Autumn Annals written by Zuo Qiuming (556 BC-451 BC). As I mentioned in the first chapter, this book mainly focus on the political and military affairs, and about the assassination, it mostly only mentions which lord is killed, but does not provide the assassin's name. However, Zhuan Zhu is different. He is the only assassin who has his name appeared in *Zuozhuan*. The story, although a very short version, is still quite similar with the version we read in *Shiji* and *Wuyue chunqiu*. Here is my translation about this part:

Translation of Zuozhuan:

The people of Wu wanted to take the advantage of the fact that Chu was in mourning and attacked it. It sent Prince Yanyu and Prince Zhuyong, leading the army to surround Qian.

It also sent Master Ji of Yanzhou to the high states, thus he came to Jin state, to watch the other lords reaction. From Chu, the Minister of Land, Ran,⁸⁵ and the Minister of Work,

85 “*Youyi*” 莠尹 is the title. “*Yi*” 尹 means “minister” in Chu and “*youyi*” is the minister

Jun,⁸⁶ leaded their army to help Qian. The Left Minister of War, Shen Yinxu,⁸⁷ leaded the princes and knights from the capital to support the army and met the army of Wu in Qiong. The Prime Minister, Zichang,⁸⁸ used boat to take army to Sharui⁸⁹ and then returned. The Left Administer, Xi Wan,⁹⁰ and the Minister of Work, Shou,⁹¹ also leaded the army to Qian, so the army of Wu could not return.

Prince Guang of Wu said: “This is the opportunity, and it should not be lost.” He told Zhuan Shezhu saying: “In the high state, there is a saying goes, if one does not seek, what will one gain? I am the heir of the King and I want to seek it. If the affair can be success, even if Master Ji came, he will not depose me.” Zhuan Shezhu said: “The king can be killed. His mother is old and his son is young. Indeed there is nothing he can do on me.” Guang said: “My body is yours!”

Summer, in the fourth month, Guang hid armed men in the cellar and invited the king. The king set the troops along the path until the gate of Guang’s house.⁹² Beside the gates, stairs, windows and mats are all the king’s confidants. They stood on both sides and hold the two-edged sword. As for the ones who held the dishes, they must show their body and change

who manages the farming affairs. “*Ran*” 然 is the name of this minister. Thus I translate it as “the Minister of Land, Ran.”

86 Similar to “*Youyi*,” “*Gongyi*” 工尹 is also a title for minister who manages the working affairs. “*Jun*” 麋 is the name of this minister.

87 “*Sima*” 司馬 is the minister who manages the war affairs. According to the *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, I translate it as “Minister of War.” “Shen Yinxu” 沈尹戌 is his name.

88 “*Lingyi*” 令尹 is the unique title in Chu and just like the “prime minister.” “Zichang” 子常 is his name.

89 I am not sure whether “*sharui*” 沙汭 is the name of a location or it just means “sand beach besides water.” Considering it is describing Chu’s reactions in the war, I tend to treat it as the name of a specific location.

90 “*Zuoyi*” 左尹 is another high ministers’ title in Chu, so I translate it as “Left Administer” trying to show it higher than normal ministers. “*Xi Wan*” 郤宛 is his name.

91 Here is another “*gongyi*,” his name is “*Shou*” 壽.

92 Here the word “*zuo*” 坐 means “place,” not literally they are “sitting” on the path.

the clothes outside,⁹³ entering by walking on their knees.⁹⁴ The troops with swords held them on both sides⁹⁵ and only release when arrived. Guang pretended to have the foot pain and entered the cellar. Zhuan Shezhu put a dagger in the belly of a fish and presented it to the king. He drew the dagger and stabbed the king. As the long swords stabbed crossed his chest, he already killed the king. Hel ü then made his son a minister.

Master Ji arrived and said: “If the old kings’ sacrifice not abandoned, the people leaded, the gods served, and the state not destroyed, then he is my king. Who will I resent? I mourn for the dead and serve the living one, in order to wait for the heaven’s order. It is not me who throw it into disorder, and for the one established, I will follow. This is the way of old men.” He reported his job, cried at Liao’s tomb, and returned to his position to serve.

Prince Yanyu of Wu escaped to Xu and Prince Zhuyong escaped to Zhongwu. The army of Chu returned after hearing Wu was in chaos.

Original Text:

吳子欲因楚喪而伐之，使公子掩餘，公子燭庸，帥師圍潛。

使延州來季子聘于上國，遂聘于晉，以觀諸侯。楚莠尹然，工尹麋，帥師救潛。左司馬沈尹戌，帥都君子與王馬之屬，以濟師，與吳師遇于窮。令尹子常以舟師及沙汭而還。左尹郤宛，工尹壽，帥師至于潛，吳師不能退。

吳公子光曰：“此時也，弗可失也。”告鱄設諸曰：“上國有言曰，不索何獲？我王嗣也，吾欲求之。事若克，季子雖至，不吾廢也。”鱄設諸曰：“王可弑也，母老子弱，是無若我何。”光曰：“我爾身也。”

夏，四月，光伏甲於堀室而享王，王使甲坐於道，及其門，門階戶席，皆王親也，

93 “*Xianti*” 獻體 means taking off the cloth to show the body, make sure there is no weapons. And “*gaifu*” 改服 means “change the clothes” for safety. Here we can see King Liao is very careful.

94 “*Zuo*” 坐 in pre-Qin period is more like “kneel,” thus “*zuoxing*” 坐行 means “moving with the kneels.” Like the “*xixing*” 膝行 in later periods.

95 The phrase “*jiacheng*” 夾承 is two words. “*Jia*” 夾 means they are on both sides and “*cheng*” 承 means they are holding the one who holds the dish, who is moving on his knees. Thus the image should be the one who holds the dish moving on the knees in the middle and two swordsmen catching him on both sides.

夾之以鉞。羞者獻體改服於門外，執羞者坐行而入，執鉞者夾承之，及體以相授也。光偽足疾，入于堀室，鱗設諸寘劍於魚中以進，抽劍刺王，鉞交於胸，遂弑王。闔廬以其子為卿。

季子至曰：“苟先君無廢祀，民人無廢主，社稷有奉，國家無傾，乃吾君也。吾誰敢怨？哀死事生，以待天命。非我生亂，立者從之，先人之道也。”復命哭墓，復位而待。

吳公子掩餘奔徐，公子燭庸奔鍾吾。楚師聞吳亂而還。

As we mentioned before, the core of Zhuan Zhu's story is the problem surrounding legitimate succession. This affair in the state of Wu must be a very famous one in that period since many other records, even not mainly about Zhuan Zhu, also mentions it. For example in *Gongyangzhuan* 公羊傳,⁹⁶ there is a story focuses on Jizi Zha, and it describes the story like this:

Translation of Gongyangzhuan:

People of Wu sent Zha to come. In the Wu state, there were no kings and no ministers. How did they have kings and ministers? It is because of the worthy Master Ji. What makes Master Ji worthy? He gave up the throne. How did he give up the throne? E⁹⁷, Yuzhai, Yimo and Master Ji are four brothers from the same mother. Master Ji was young but talented. All brothers loved him and wanted to establish him as the King together. E said: “Now if we give the throne to Master Ji forcefully, Master Ji will not accept it. Please don't pass the throne to the sons but the brothers. We brothers be the kings one by one, and finally pass the throne to Master Ji.” They all said: “Good.”

In the past time, as for those who were the lords, they took ignoring death as the brave. While eating, they always prayed that: “If the Heaven bless our state of Wu, please quickly

96 Wang Weiti 王維提 and Tang Shuwen 唐書文, *Chunqiu gongyangzhuan yizhu* 春秋公羊傳譯注 (Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1997).

97 In *Shiji* and *Wuyue chunqiu*, this king's name is Zhufan.

make the regret on my body.”⁹⁸ Thus E died and Yuzhai established. Yuzhai also died and Yimo established. Yimo also died, and then the throne should be passed to Master Ji. Master Ji was being a messenger and he escaped.

As for Liao, he was their brother but not from the queen, he got the throne. Master Ji returned from messenger job, arrived and treated him as the king. Hel ü said: “The reason that old kings did not pass the throne to the sons but to the brothers, is all because of Master Ji. If we follow the order of old kings, then the throne should be past to Master Ji. If not, then I am the one should be established. How can Liao be the king?” Thus he sent Zhuan Zhu to assassinate Liao, and gave the throne to Master Ji.

Master Ji did not accept it, saying: “You killed my king. If I take the throne from you, then it means I usurp together with you. You killed my brother. If I killed you, then it means us family members killing each other – that will not stop for the whole life.” He went to Yanling and did not enter the Wu state for the rest of his life.

Thus the gentlemen took his not accepting as righteousness, and his not killing as kindness. Why if we consider Master Ji worthy then the state of Wu had kings and ministers? It is because if Master Ji was the minister, then there must to have a king.⁹⁹ What is Zha? It is the name of Master Ji of Wu. *Chunqiu* did not record the name of worthy people, why he has name? To accept the barbarian, only one was not enough.¹⁰⁰ As for Master Ji, he was considered worthy, but what is not enough for Master Ji? As for those who were ministers, we must record them as ministers; and as for those who were sons, we must record them as

98 This means they wish to die earlier to pass the throne.

99 These two sentence means, since we accept Master Ji’s worthy we must also accept his identity of being a minister. However Wu is the barbarian state without real kings and ministers. Thus, to accept Master Ji, we must first accept the fact that Wu also has kings and ministers.

100 This sentence means although Master Ji is worthy, we cannot ignore the fact that he is a barbarian. Thus we should record his name to make it different from the other recorded worthy people.

sons.¹⁰¹

Original Text:

吳子使札來聘。吳無君、無大夫，此何以有君、有大夫？賢季子也。何賢乎季子？讓國也。其讓國奈何？謁也、餘祭也、夷昧也與季子同母者四，季子弱而才，兄弟皆愛之，同欲立之以為君，謁曰：“今若是迨而與季子國，季子猶不受也，請無與子而與弟，弟兄迭為君，而致國乎季子。”皆曰：“諾。”

故諸為君者，皆輕死為勇，飲食必祝，曰：“天苟有吳國，尚速有悔於予身。”故謁也死，餘祭也立。餘祭也死，夷昧也立。夷昧也死，則國宜之季子者也。季子使而亡焉。

僚者長庶也，即之，季子使而反，至，而君之爾。闔廬曰：“先君之所以不與子國而與弟者，凡為季子故也。將從先君之命與，則國宜之季子者也；如不從先君之命與，則我宜立者也，僚惡得為君乎？”於是使專諸刺僚，而致國乎季子。

季子不受，曰：“爾弑吾君，吾受爾國，是吾與爾為篡也。爾殺吾兄，吾又殺爾，是父子兄弟相殺，終身無已也。”去之延陵，終身不入吳國。

故君子以其不受為義，以其不殺為仁。賢季子則吳何以有君、有大夫？以季子為臣，則宜有君者也。札者何？吳季子之名也。《春秋》賢者不名，此何以名？許夷狄者不壹而足也。季子者所賢也，曷為不足乎季子？許人臣者必使臣，許人子者必使子也。

But an interesting difference between *Gongyangzhuan* and *Shiji* is, in *Gongyangzhuan*, Liao is recorded as the brother of the other three kings, but not from the queen. *Shuoyuan* 說苑 also follows the version of *Gongyangzhuan* while telling the story of Master Ji. However in *Shiji*, he is the son of Yimo. Thus we can see two versions of Liao's identity – in *Shiji* and *Wuyue chunqiu*, he is Yimo's son, but in *Gongyangzhuan* and *Shuoyuan*, he is also Shoumeng's son but not from the queen. This does not change the main plot of the story, but this changes the succession problem. If Liao is the son of Yimo, the question is: “After Master Ji escaped, whose son should be the king?” This is purely about the throne, since Guang, as the old king's son and Liao, as the present king's son, both have their own reason

101 These sentences imply that “as for those who are barbarian, we must record them as barbarians,” thus Master Ji's name is recorded.

to claim they can be the heir. But if Liao is the son of Shoumeng, Guang's (Hel ü) action means as the brother not from the queen, Liao does not even have the qualifications to join the plan of the three brothers. In other words, the core question is actually "Whether a brother not coming from the queen should be treated as a brother?"

Therefore, for the story that focuses on Ji Zha, such as the one in *Gongyangzhuan*, it will tend to treat Liao as a brother. In this way, it can show that Ji Zha is worthy – he treats a brother coming from the concubine as his own brother. But for the story about Zhuan Zhu, just like *Shiji*, treating Liao as another prince can make the assassination more reasonable. Just like *Shiji* describes Prince Guang's word: "If we follow the brothers' order, then Master Ji should be established. If we must make the son as the heir, then I am the real heir born of the queen, and I should be established." Since normally after Guang's father, Zhufan's death, he should be established. However his father passes the throne to Yuzhai, his young brother, since he wants to finally give the throne to his youngest brother Jizi Zha. In this situation, there's nothing Guang can do since it is his father's determination. However after Jizi Zha refuses to be the king, Guang knows the chance comes. It is very reasonable for him to hate Liao and wants to kill him because in his opinion, Liao is the one who steals his throne. And for Liao, he also has very good reason to believe himself to be the king since he gets the throne from his father. On the contrary, if still making Liao a concubine's child here, he just "steals" the throne from Jizi Zha, there's nothing that relates to Guang. This can explain why Liao has a different identity in different stories.

For the three versions about Zhuan Zhu, we can take a look at this table to compare the difference:

	<i>Shiji</i>			<i>Wuyue chunqiu</i>	<i>Zuozhuan</i>
	Cike liezhuan	Wutaibo shijia	Wuzixu liezhuan		
Wu Zixu met	Simple	_____ ¹⁰²	_____	Very	_____

102 This means the plot is not mentioned in this story.

Zhuan Zhu				Detailed	
Prince Guang met Zhuan Zhu	Simple	Simple	———	Very Detailed	———
The war between Wu and Chu	Simple	Simple	Simple	Simple	Very Detailed
Prince Guang's decision	Very Detailed	Detailed	———	Very Detailed	Detailed
Zhuan Zhu's action of assassination	Very Detailed	Detailed	Simple	Very Detailed	Detailed
After assassination	Simple	Detailed	Simple	Detailed	Detailed

In *Shiji*, “Cike liezhuan” chapter is the most detailed one about Prince Guang’s decision and Zhuan Zhu’s action of assassination. Certainly that is because it is the biography about Zhuan Zhu. In “Wutaibo shijia,” it makes the decision and assassination part simpler, but still detailed enough since it is the death of a king of Wu. At the same time, it adds more description about the affairs after the assassination about Jizi Zha and the two princes in Chu. This part is not related to Zhuan Zhu but important for the Wu state, thus it is put in the chapter “Wutaibo shijia,” but cannot be seen in “Cike liezhuan.” “Wu Zixu liezhuan” is the simplest one about this assassination. It is understandable since the biography needs to mention many more other stories about Wu Zixu. And because of this, it gives another detail that after assassination, Hel ü (Prince Guang) called Wu Zixu and made him an Envoy.

The story in *Wuyue chunqiu* is totally more detailed compared with *Shiji*. Almost all the plots in *Shiji* can be found in *Wuyue chunqiu*. At the same time, it adds more plots. For example, it describes the first meeting of Wu Zixu and Zhuan Zhu with a small story, and describes the appearance of Zhuan Zhu. This makes Zhuan Zhu’s image more vivid. While Prince Guang met Zhuan Zhu, *Wuyue chunqiu* describes their conversation exhaustively, including Prince Guang introducing the situation to Zhuan Zhu and Zhuan Zhu asking if there was any other ways to solve without assassination. In the end, Zhuan Zhu went to learn fish cooking, which explains why the dagger was put in the fish’s belly.

Another interesting plot of *Wuyue chunqiu* is rather than Prince Guang making the

decision himself, it turns out that Wu Zixu persuaded him. In *Shiji*'s version, Wu Zixu totally quitted the plan after presenting Zhuan Zhu to Prince Guang. But in *Wuyue chunqiu*, he still paid close attention to the change of Wu. Considering Wu Zixu is a main character in the whole *Wuyue chunqiu* book, this detail is necessary. Also it makes it more reasonable for Hel ü to discuss the state's affairs with Wu Zixu in later chapters after he showed his ability here.

What is more, *Wuyue chunqiu* gives King Liao more chances to show his reaction about Prince Guang's banquet. He discussed with his mother, wore the armor, and he was already warned about Prince Guang's ambition. All these details about King Liao's defense can prove Zhuan Zhu's bravery from the side, just like the description before, "his anger could compare with ten thousands men, and could not be matched." The affairs after assassination, such as Master Ji's returning and the two princes' surrendering to Chu are also recorded like *Shiji*.

Zuozhuan gives the most detailed description about the war between Wu and Chu in all these versions. The others only mention Chu sent its army to cut off the troop of Wu from behind, while *Zuozhuan* points out all the ministers who led the army to join the war and their marching route. An interesting detail in *Zuozhuan* is those who present the food in the banquet must show their body outside and kneel while being held by two guards. This detail shows the necessity of putting the dagger in the fish's belly – there's nowhere else can hide it.

But no matter what the story changes, the core of Zhuan Zhu's affair is: he killed King Liao, with a blade hidden in the fish, for King Hel ü. As for Hel ü, history proves him to be a worthy king. During his ruling period, the Wu state defeated the Chu and Yue states and became one of the strongest states at that time. Thus by assassinating King Liao, Zhuan Zhu changed the political situation not only in the Wu state, but also in the entire land of China.

Chapter 3: Jing Ke

Jing Ke 荊軻, also known as Jing Qing 荊卿, which means Sir Jing,¹⁰³ may be one of the most famous assassins in the whole Chinese history. And his fame, is highly possible to come from the fame of the one he tried to assassinate – the first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huang 秦始皇. While the Emperor, pushing forward his progress of conquering the entire China, a Prince of the north state, Yan, sent his assassin-retainer Jing Ke to the Emperor because of the worry of future. Jing Ke successfully got close to the Emperor in the court with a dagger hidden in the map. It is believed that according to the law of Qin, the ministers in the court could not carry any weapons, thus at that time, Jing Ke and the Emperor were the only two armed men in the palace. Jing Ke had a very good chance, but finally he missed and killed by the Emperor. His failure also represented the anger of the Emperor and caused the Yan state being destroyed by Qin.

However, although failed on his mission, Jing Ke is still highly praised in the later periods. Scholars believe it maybe because of his bravery of entering the strongest state at that time to assassinate its leader only with a dagger. And this image is very much owed to the record in *Shiji*. In this chapter, I will provide three versions of Jing Ke's story, from *Shiji*, *Zhanguoce* 戰國策¹⁰⁴ and *Yandanzi* 燕丹子.¹⁰⁵

In *Shiji*, the story of Jing Ke is also in the “Cike liezhuan” as Zhuan Zhu. And similar to Zhuan Zhu, the affair of Jing Ke is mentioned from time to time in other chapters. Here I will give the translation of “Cike liezhuan” first, and then another paragraph related to Jing Ke in the chapter “Yanzhaogong shijia 燕召公世家,” just like the “Wutaibo shijia” for Zhuan Zhu.

103 “*Qing*” 卿 here is to show the respect, but not a title as minister.

104 Liu Xiang 劉向, *Zhanguoce* 戰國策 (Shanghai guji chubanshe 上海古籍出版社, 1985).

105 *Yandanzi* 燕丹子 (Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1985).

*Translation of Shiji:*The Biographies of the Assassins¹⁰⁶

220 years after that,¹⁰⁷ there was the affair of Jing Ke in Qin.

As for Jing Ke, he was the one who come from the state of Wei. His ancestors were people of Qi, who moved to Wei. The people of Wei called him Qing Qing (or Sir Qing).¹⁰⁸ When he entered Yan, the people of Yan called him Jing Qing (or Sir Jing).

Jing Qing loved reading and swordplay. He tried to persuade Lord Yuan of Wei of his skills, but Lord Yuan of Wei did not employ him. Later, Qin attacked Wei, established the Dong Jun, and moved the clansmen of Lord Yuan of Wei to Yewang.¹⁰⁹

Once, Jing Ke traveled and visited Yuci on his way. He discussed swordsmanship with Ge Nie there. Ge Nie became angry and glared at him. Jing Ke got out. Someone spoke of calling him back gain. Ge Nie said: “When I discussed the swordsmanship with him, we had a disagreement and I glared at him. You can try to find him, but he should have left. He wouldn’t dare to stay.”

He sent a messenger to Jing Ke’s host, but Jing Qing had already rode a horse and left Yuci. The messenger returned to report, Ge Nie said: “Of course he left. I stared him down.”

When Jing Ke traveled to Handan, Lu Goujian¹¹⁰ played the *bo*¹¹¹ game with Jing Ke. They contended for lanes. Lu Goujian became angry and shouted at him. Jing Ke was silent

106 My translation of this biography mainly adapted from William H. Nienhauser, Jr.’s *The Grand Scribe’s Records* (Indiana University Press, 1994).

107 Here is after the affair of Nie Zhen 聶政 described in paragraphs before. The exact number of years is different according to different versions, even in *Shiji*, the timeline in “Liuguo nianbiao” 六國年表 is different from the one here.

108 According to the footnotes in *Shiji* (p. 1967), Qing 慶 and Jing 荊 sound similar. It is highly possible that when Jing Ke reached Yan, he changed his name to fit the local language.

109 “Yewang” 野王 here is the name of place, not a title.

110 This one, Lu Goujian 魯勾踐, his name is the same as a famous king of Yue, Goujian 勾踐. It may have some meaning, but we cannot figure it out now. The footnote in *Shiji* also points this out (p. 1968).

111 Here “bo” 博 is a kind of gambling game, it may look like a kind of chess.

and then escaped. They never met again.

After Jing Ke had arrived at the Yan state, he grew to like a dog butcher in Yan as well as Gao Jianli, who was a skilled dulcimer¹¹² player. Jing Ke was fond of wine, and every day he drank with the dog butcher and Gao Jianli in the Yan market. After they were inebriated, Gao Jianli struck the dulcimer and Jing Ke sang in harmony in the marketplace. After they enjoyed themselves together, they cried together, as if there was no one else around. Although Jing Ke associated with drinkers, he was still recondite and loved reading. When he traveled to various feudal states, he established ties exclusively with worthy, powerful and respectable men. When he entered the Yan state, a retired knight, Tian Guang, also treated him well, because he knew that Jing Ke was not an average man.

A while later was when Prince Dan of Yan, who had been a hostage in Qin, escaped and returned to Yan. As for Prince Dan, he once was a hostage in Zhao, and Zhen, the King of Qin, was also born in Zhao. They were very friendly in youth. When Zhen was established as the King of Qin, Dan became a hostage in Qin. The King of Qin treated Prince Dan badly, thus Dan bore resentment and escaped home. After returning, he sought means to seek retribution from the King of Qin, but his state was small and his strength insufficient. After that, Qin daily sent troops to the east of the Yao Mountain and attacked Qi, Chu and the three Jin states, gradually nibbling away these various feudal lords. It was about to reach the Yan state, and the King and ministers of Yan were all afraid for the disaster to come. Prince Dan was worried about this, and asked his teacher¹¹³ Ju Wu.

Wu answered: “Qin’s lands cover the world and its majesty threatens the clans of Han, Wei and Zhao. To the north, it has the strong-holds of Ganquan and Gukou. To the south, it

112 “*Zhu*” 筑 is believed to be a kind of musical instrument with strings, the player using bamboo to hit it while playing. Here I translate it as “dulcimer” since it looks quite similar. However the real “dulcimer” is believed shown until Ming dynasty.

113 The title “*fu*” 傅 means he is the one who teaches the princes. Thus here I translate it directly as “his teacher”.

has the fertile lands of Jin and Wei. It holds the wealth of Ba and Han. To the right, it has mountains Long and Shu. To the left, it has the redoubts of Guan and Yao.¹¹⁴ Its people are populous and its knights are strong. It also has more than enough weapons and armors. If it plans to lash out, then no place – from south of the Great Wall to north of Yi River – will be secure. How could you wish to touch¹¹⁵ its deadly scale¹¹⁶ because of your resentment of being humiliated?”

Dan asked: “Then what other way is there?”

He answered: “Let me withdraw and consider it.”

After some time had passed, the Qin general Fan Wuji offended the King of Qin and escaped to the Yan state. The Prince received him and put him in the guesthouse.

Ju Wu remonstrated, saying: “You cannot do this! The King of Qin’s anger against Yan is already enough to chill the heart,¹¹⁷ how much more will that be when he heard General Fan is here? This is called ‘throwing meat to block the hungry tiger’s path,’ and the disaster will be beyond remedy.¹¹⁸ Even if you have Guan Zhong and Yan Ying,¹¹⁹ they cannot make a plan for you. My Prince, please send General Fan to Xiongnu¹²⁰ to close his mouth. Then please make an agreement with the three Jin states to the west, make alliance with Qi and Chu to the south, and come to terms with the Chanyu¹²¹ to the north. Only after that, we can have our plan.”

114 In these sentences, the “left” and “right” directions are in the situation of facing south. Thus, “left” means “east” and “right” means “west.”

115 According to the footnote in Shiji, “*pi*” 批 here means touch (p. 1968).

116 In Chinese tales, the dragon has a “*nilin*” 逆鳞, deadly scale, under its neck. When someone touches it, the dragon will burst into anger and destroy everything. Here Ju Wu use the dragon to describe the powerful Qin state.

117 “*Hanxin*” 寒心 here means “heart tremble,” describing the situation of very scared.

118 “*Zhen*” 振 here means “remedy,” so “*buzhen*” 不振 is “beyond remedy.”

119 Guan Zhong 管仲 and Yan Ying 晏嬰 are both famous ministers in the Spring and Autumn Annals.

120 “Xiongnu” 匈奴 is the barbarian in North, there means sent General Fan to north barbarian place and let him die there.

121 “Chanyu” 單于 is the title of leaders of Xiongnu at north.

The Prince said: “Your plan is time-consuming. My heart is anxious, and I’m afraid I cannot wait that long.¹²² And that is not the only reason. It is that when General Fan was denied shelter by the entire world, he turned to me. I will never abandon an acquaintance who I love and pity because of the pressure from the mighty Qin. The day I send him to Xiongnu will surely be the day I die. I hope you can consider it again, my teacher.”

Ju Wu said: “To risk hazard in pursuit of safety, to invite disaster in pursuit of good fortune, to make shallow plans yet harbor profound resentment, to maintain a newly formed friendship of one but ignore the big damage to the state, this is called ‘feeding resentment and aiding disaster.’ If you put a feather over stove coals, it will surely soon disappear. If you allow the predatory Qin to vent its cruel and resentful anger on us, then there is no need to discuss what will happen. There is Sir Tian Guang in Yan, who is deep in thought and profoundly daring. You can consult with him.”

The Prince said: “I hope I can make the acquaintance of Sir Tian through you, my teacher. Is that possible?”

Ju Wu said: “I shall respectfully comply.”

He left and met Sir Tian, said: “The Prince hopes to consult the state affair with you.”

Tian Guang said: “I respectfully follow his instructions.” and went there.

The Prince welcomed him, walked backwards to lead him inside,¹²³ knelt down and dusted off the mat.¹²⁴ Tian Guang took his seat, and there were no one else standing beside him.

The Prince moved off his mat¹²⁵ and made the request: “Yan and Qin cannot both exist.

122 Here the Prince implies that he is worried about Qin every day and if this continues, he may die before that plan works.

123 “*Xixing weidao*” 卻行為導 means the Prince walks backwards to lead the way for him, showing his respect.

124 Here it means the Prince dust off the mat before ask Tian Guang to sit – although the mat should be clean – to show his respect.

125 The prince move off the mat first before speaking is also a phenomenon to show his

Sir, please devote your attention to this.”

Tan Guang said: “I have heard that, when the good horse was in its prime, it can run a thousand *li* in one day; but when it becomes old, even the bad horses can surpass it. Now, my Prince that you have heard of my prime, but you have not realized that my vigor has vanished. Although I do not dare to plan the states affair, my friend, Jing Qing, can be employed.”

The Prince said: “I hope that I can make the acquaintance of Jing Qing through you, sir. Is that possible?”

Tian Guang said: “I will respectfully comply.” As soon as he rose up, he began to walk out in small steps.

The Prince accompanied him to the gate, warned him saying: “What I reported to you and what you spoke to me were big affairs of our state. Sir, please do not disclose it to others.”

Tian Guang bowed down¹²⁶ and laughed: “Of course.”

Bowed with age, he met Jing Qing and said: “My friendship with you is known to all in the Yan state. Now the Prince heard about my prime, but he did not know my frame is failing. He graced me with his presence and told me: ‘Yan and Qin cannot both exist. Sir, please devote your attention to this.’ Presuming upon our friendship, I spoke of you to the Prince. I hope you can call on him at the palace.”

“I will respectfully follow your words.” said Jing Ke.

Tian Guang then said: “I have heard that, the actions of an honorable man do not cause the others to doubt him. Today the Prince told me: ‘What I reported to you and what you spoke to me were big affairs of our state. Sir, please do not disclose to others.’ That is the Prince doubting me. When ones actions cause the others to doubt him, it is no high-principled

respect.

126 “*Fu*” 俛 is the same as “*fu*” 俯, which means look down. Here this detail shows Tian Guang has some thoughts in his heart so he does not look at the Prince.

gallant.”

He wanted to commit suicide to stir Jing Ke, thus he said: “I hope that you will hasten to call on the prince, and tell him I have already died to demonstrate my silence.” Then Tian Guang slit his own throat.

Jing Ke then met the Prince, told him that Tian Guang had already died and relayed his words. The Prince kneeled and bowed twice, moving on his knees and weeping.

Only after some time, he spoke saying: “The reason I warned Sir Tian is because I wanted our big plan to succeed. Now Sir Tian uses death to demonstrate his silence, how could that have been my intention?”

After Jing Ke was seated, the Prince removed himself from his mat and knocked his forehead on the ground,¹²⁷ said: “Sir Tian, being ignorant of my lack of worth, has made it possible for you to come and for us to talk. This is the Heaven taking pity on Yan and does not abandon its orphan. Now Qin is greedy for profit, and its desires can never be satisfied. Not until it exhausted the worlds’ lands and enslaved the world’s kings will it be satisfied. Now Qin has already captured the King of Han and incorporated all of his land. Again it raised troops to attack Chu in the south and tower over Zhao in the north. Wang Jian is leading hundreds of thousands men to Zhang and Ye. Li Xin is making expedition to Taiyuan and Yunzhong. When Zhao is unable to resist Qin, it will sure submit as a vassal to us.¹²⁸ When it submits as a vassal, the disaster will come to Yan. Yan is small and weak, has several times been surrounded by troops. Now I have calculated that even the resources of the entire state cannot be a match to Qin. The other lords have submitted to Qin and not dare to form

127 “*Dunshou*” 頓首 means “knock head (on the ground),” another way to show the respect.

128 “*Ruchen*” 入臣 means “submit as a vassal.” But here it does not point out to Qin or to Yan. Considering the later sentence is “the disaster will come to Yan,” I believe the situation that Zhao submit as a vassal to Yan to seek protection and causes Qin to attack Yan will be more reasonable.

Vertical Alliance.¹²⁹ By my own calculations, I foolishly suggested that if we can get the bravest knight of the world, and send him to Qin and have him show off great attractions. The King of Qin is greedy, so he is sure to desire this. If we are then able to catch the King of Qin, and force him to return all the lands he took from the other lords, just like what Cao Mo did to Duke Huan of Qi, and that will be very good. If that is not possible, then we can kill him. Since the great generals of Qin are leading army abroad and when strife arises at home, the lord and ministers will doubt each other. This creates the opening with which the other feudal lords to form Vertical Alliance and surely defeat Qin. This is my greatest hope, but I do not know to whom I can entrust it. Sir Jing, please consider this.”

After a long pause, Jing Ke said: “This is the great affair of the state. I am foolish and inferior. I’m afraid I am not enough to take on such a task.”

The Prince moved forward and knocked his forehead on the ground, doggedly imploring him not to decline, so that in the end Jing Ke agreed. The Prince then made Jing Qing the Senior Minister and housed him with the best house. The Prince daily appeared at his gate, supplied him with Tailao food,¹³⁰ and frequently gifted him with novel objects. Chariots, horses, and beautiful women, pandering to Jing Ke’s every wish, in order to meet his expectations.

After a long time, Jing Ke showed no signs of setting out. General Wang Jian of Qin defeated Zhao, captured the King of Zhao, and got all its land. The troops moved north took over territories, until it reached the southern border of Yan.

Prince Dan was afraid and implored Jing Ke saying: “Qin’s troops will cross the Yi River any day. At that time, even though I wish to continue accompanying you, I will not be

129 “Hezong” 合縱, translated as “Vertical Alliance,” is one of the famous thoughts in the Warring States Period. It means all the other six states unite together to defend Qin’s attack, or attack Qin together.

130 “Tailao” 太牢 means the “pork, beef and sheep.” Here it mean the Prince serves the best food (from the great sacrifice) to Jing Ke.

able to.”

Jing Ke said: “Even if you had not spoken, I will also do my best. But now I set off without a token of trust, I will not be able to get close to Qin. As for General Fan, the King of Qin offered a thousand *jin* of gold and a manor of ten thousand household to get him. If I can get the head of General Fan and the map of Dugang area¹³¹ of Yan, present them to the King of Qin, and the King will surely be happy to see me. Then I will have the chance to repay you.”

The Prince said: “General Fan came to me in the time of trouble, and I could not bear to violate the elder’s intention over my private affairs. Sir, please consider it once more!”

Jing Ke knew that the Prince could not bear it, so he met Fan Wuji in private, and said: “Qin’s treatment to General can be called cruel indeed; your parents and kinsmen have all been killed. Now I heard the King put a bounty of a thousand *jin* of gold and ten thousands household on your head. What will you do?”

Wuji looked up and sighed deeply: “Each time I think of it, the pain cuts to my marrow! It is just because I don’t have a plan to revenge!”

Jing Ke said: “Now I have a word to solve the worry of Yan, and take your revenge, how would that be?”

Wuji then moved forward and asked: “What is it?”

Jing Ke said: “I wish to have your head and present it to the King of Qin, and the King will surely be happy to meet me. I will catch his sleeve with my left hand, and stab him in the chest with my right hand. Then, your revenge will be repaid and Yan’s humiliation will be erased. Do you have the same thought?”

Fan Wuji bared one shoulder, caught his wrist and moved forward said: “That is what I day and night gnashed my teeth and seared my heart for! At last I have been able to hear your

131 It is believed the Dugang area is the wealthiest area in Yan. Giving this map means Yan is willing to give the land to Qin.

instruction!” Then he slit his own throat.

When the Prince heard it, he rushed there, leaned over the corpse, and mourned in deep sorrow. Since there was already nothing he could do, he put Fan Wuji’s head in a box and sealed it.

At that time, the Prince looked for the sharpest dagger in the world before, and he found the dagger of Xu Furen¹³² of Zhao. He bought it with a hundred gold, and asked the worker to coat it with poison. When he tried it on human, even when the blood was just enough to stain one silk thread,¹³³ none of them avoid dying immediately. Then he prepared it for the purpose of sending Jing Qing off. In the Yan state, there was a brave knight called Qin Wuyang. He killed man only at the age of thirteen. The people did not dare to look at him directly. The Prince then asked him to be the assistant of Jing Ke. Jing Ke was waiting for someone, intending to have him go along. That man lived at a distance and had not yet arrived, but the Prince already prepared everything for the journey.

After some time, Jing Ke still did not set off. The Prince felt it too late, and considered Jing Ke may change his mind. He again went to ask: “There is no time left, Jing Qing do you still have the mind on that? I would request to send Qing Wuyang first.”

Jing Ke was angered and roared at the Prince: “What is this about sending him first? One who sets off without return is a whelp!¹³⁴ Moreover, I will enter the unfathomably mighty Qin only with a single dagger. The reason I am staying here is because I am waiting for my retainer to go along. Now, since you feel it is late, I will take my leave!” Then he set out.

The Prince and the other retainers who knew this affair all wore the white robes and

132 Here the “*furen*” 夫人 of “Xu Furen” 徐夫人 is his name, but not the meaning of “wife.” This one is male.

133 This sentence means the drug is very poisonous, only a small cut is enough to kill a man.

134 This sentence is very strange and here I translate it literally. Personally, here Jing Ke’s meaning is “if I escape and not return, then I am a whelp.” In other words, he is not a whelp, and he wait here is not because of afraid but has his reason.

caps to see them off. When they reached the Yi River, they performed setting-out sacrifice and chose the route.¹³⁵ Gao Jianli struck the dulcimer, and Jing Ke sang in harmony in the key of a minus Zheng. All the knights were weeping. Jing Ke then went forward and sang: “The wind cries and the Yi River is cold. The bold man leaves and he will never return!” He then again performed cries in the key of Yu. All the knights glared their eyes and the hair bristled beneath the caps. Jing Ke then mounted the chariot and left. He never looked back.

They then arrived at Qin, and generously presented gifts worth a thousand gold to the Palace Cadet,¹³⁶ Meng Jia, who is the King’s favorite minister. Jia then spoke first to the King of Qin, saying: “The King of Yan trembles before your power and does not dare to raise troops to oppose our army. He wishes to let his state be our vassal, place it among our other feudal lords and pay tribute like a prefecture commandery,¹³⁷ in order to maintain and sacrifice the temple of his ancestors. He does not dare to speak in person, and only cut off the head of Fan Wuji, and brought it with the map of Dugang area. These are sealed in boxes and send to our court. He sends a messenger to hear from you, Great King. And the messenger is now waiting for your order, my King.”

The King of Qin heard it, and he was very happy. Then he put on the court robe and had the nine levels officials¹³⁸ arrayed to receive the messenger of Yan in the palace of Xianyang.¹³⁹ Jing Ke held the box, which contained the head of Fan Wuji, and Qin Wuyang held the box of map. They went in one after the other.

When they reach the steps, Qin Wuyang turned pale and trembled. The officials felt

135 “*Jizu*” 既祖 means already did the ancestor worshipping and “*qudao*” 取道 means choosing the path to take. Here it means they finish all the ritual.

136 According to the *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, I translate “*zhongshuzi*” 中庶子 as “Palace Cadet,” this is a close minister who serve the King’s life. So he has the chance to speak to the King like in this plot.

137 “*Junxian*” 郡縣, translated as “prefecture” is the way to divide lands in Qin, different from the other states “*yi*” 邑 or “*guo*” 國.

138 “*Jiubin*” 九賓 means the highest ritual in court. However some scholars also argue this may not consider to be the same “*jiubin*” in the ritual of Zhou. See *Shiji* p. 1973.

139 Xianyang is the capital of Qin.

him strange. Jing Ke looked at Wuyang, smiled and said: “This is a vulgar person from the barbarian north, and he has never seen the Son of Heaven. Thus he trembles. My King, please be a little tolerant of him and allow him to fulfill his mission.”

The King of Qin told Jing Ke: “Take that map Wuyang holds.” Jing Ke then took the map and presented it. The King of Qin unrolled the map. When the map reached the end, the dagger appeared.

Then Jing Ke caught the sleeve of King with his left hand, grabbed the dagger and stabbed the King’s chest in his right hand. Before the dagger touched his chest, the King was startled and stood up. His sleeve was torn off. He tried to pull out his sword, but it was too long, so he could only grasp its scabbard.¹⁴⁰ Since he was hurried at that time and sword fit tightly, he could not draw it immediately. Jing Ke pursued the King of Qin, and the King escaped around the pillars. The officials were all startled, because this was sudden and unexpected. They all lost their composure.

As for the law of Qin, the officials who entered the palace could not hold even the smallest weapon.¹⁴¹ All the guards¹⁴² who hold weapons were arrayed below the hall, and they were not able to enter without a command. In this urgent moment, the King was not able to command the troops. For this reason Jing Ke could pursue the King. And finally in urgency, the officials had no weapons to attack to Jing Ke, so they together struck him with bare hands. At that time, the servant doctor Xia Wuqie threw the medicine bag he held at Jing Ke.

The King of Qin had just run around the pillars. He was in a hurry and did not know what to do. The attendants shouted: “King, put the sword on your back!” Once the King put it on his back, he was able to draw it and attack Jing Ke, cutting open his left leg.

140 “*Shi*” 室 here means the scabbard of the sword.

141 Here Sima Qian uses the word “*chicun*” 尺寸, which means very short. To show this meaning, I translate it as “smallest weapon.”

142 “*Langzhong*” 郎中 here is the officials and soldiers who protect the palace, so I use the word “guards” to translate it.

Jing Ke collapsed, then drew his dagger and threw it at the King. It missed him, and hit the bronze pillar. The King of Qin attacked Jing Ke again, and Jing Ke was wounded eight times. Ke knew his affair would not succeed, thus he laughed leaning against a pillar. Then he sat with the legs spread¹⁴³ and cursed: “The reason my attempt failed was because I want to catch you alive, in order to obtain a covenant and repay the Prince.”

The guards then moved forward and killed Jing Ke. The King felt disturbed for a long time. After that, he awarded all officials according to their contributions. He also presented Xia Wuqie two hundred *yi* of gold, said: “Wuqie loves me, and thus he threw his medicine bag at Jing Ke.”

Thus the King of Qin was in great anger. He sent more troops to Zhao and ordered Wang Jian to lead them to attack Yan. In the tenth month they seized the Ji city. King Xi of Yan, the Crown Prince Dan and the others all led their finest troops east to defend in Liaodong. Li Xin, a general of Qin, chased and attacked the King of Yan very hurriedly. King Jia of Dai then sent King Xi of Yan a letter, saying: “The reason that Qin chased Yan in such a hurry is because of your crown prince Dan. Now if you indeed kill Dan and present him to the King of Qin, the King will surely abandon the troops. Then your altars of soil and grain will have the fortune of continuing to receive the blood sacrifices.”

After that, Li Xin chased Dan, and Dan hid in the Yan River. The King of Yan then sent a messenger to kill the Crown Prince Dan and wanted to present him to Qin. Qin again sent troops to attack him. Five years later, Qin completely destroyed Yan and captured King Xi of Yan.

In the year after, Qing conquered the entire real and established his title as the Emperor. After that, Qin pursued the retainers of Prince Dan and Jing Ke, so that they all escaped. Gao

143 “*Jiju*” 箕踞 means sitting with the legs spread. It is believed to be a very rude posture in early China.

Jianli changed his name and became a servant, hiding in the Songzi¹⁴⁴ prefecture.

A long time after that, whenever he was tired from his work and heard the guests playing dulcimer in the hall, he would linger and would be unable to leave. He always said upon exiting that “He plays this part well and that part not so well.”

The other retainers told his master, said: “That servant understands music, and he secretly criticizes them.” The master of the house called him forward to strike the dulcimer, and everyone seated there all praised him, bestowed him wine.

Then Gao Jianli thought it has been almost endless that he was hiding himself. So he went back, took out his dulcimer and his good clothes, changed his appearance and came forward. All guests seated were startled, descended to perform the greeting rituals of equals, and treated him as an honored guest. When he struck the dulcimer and sang, none of the guests would leave without tears.

People in Songzi took turns to host him and the news was heard by the First Emperor of Qin. When the Emperor summoned him, someone recognized him and said: “It’s Gao Jianli!”

The Emperor loved his skill of striking dulcimer, granted him a great pardon, and only blinded his eyes.

The Emperor ordered him to strike the dulcimer, each time he praised him. The Emperor gradually became closer to him. Gao Jianli then put the lead¹⁴⁵ into his dulcimer. When he was able to be close to the Emperor again, he raised the dulcimer and hit the Emperor. He missed. Then the Emperor killed Gao Jianli. And in the rest of his life, he never got close to any man of other feudal lords.

Lu Goujian had heard Jing Ke assassinated the King of Qin, he privately said: “Alas,

144 About this “Songzi” 宋子, *Shiji* has a footnote mentions it maybe the name of a city. It can also read as “Song Masters.” I think both of them can make sense, but here I decide to follow the footnote.

145 Putting lead in the dulcimer, so it will become heavy enough to kill a person.

what a shame he was not good at sword playing! How profound has it been my failure to understand him! In the past when I shouted at him, he must think I was not the same kind of man!”

The Grand Scribe says: “When our generation speaks of Jing Ke, they speak of the fate of the Prince Dan as ‘the Heaven rains grain and the horse grows horns.’ That is going too far. Some also says that Jing Ke has hurted the King of Qin, which is also false. Earlier, Gongsun Jigong and Scholar Dong traveled with Xia Wuqie, so they got to know the affair well and they told me just like this.¹⁴⁶ From Cao Mo to Jing Ke, among these five assassins, in the cases of some their righteousness was realized and some was not. But it is clear that they all had determination. They did not sell their goals short. That their names will be handed down to later generations, how can it be undeserving!

Original Texts:

其後二百二十餘年秦有荊軻之事。

荊軻者，衛人也。其先乃齊人，徙於衛，衛人謂之慶卿。而之燕，燕人謂之荊卿。

荊卿好讀書擊劍，以術說衛元君，衛元君不用。其後秦伐魏，置東郡，徙衛元君之支屬於野王。

荊軻嘗游過榆次，與蓋聶論劍，蓋聶怒而目之。荊軻出，人或言復召荊卿。蓋聶曰：“曩者吾與論劍有不稱者，吾目之；試往，是宜去，不敢留。”使使往之主人，荊卿則已駕而去榆次矣。使者還報，蓋聶曰：“固去也，吾曩者目攝之！”

荊軻游於邯鄲，魯句踐與荊軻博，爭道，魯句踐怒而叱之，荊軻嘿而逃去，遂不復會。

荊軻既至燕，愛燕之狗屠及善擊筑者高漸離。荊軻嗜酒，日與狗屠及高漸離飲於燕市，酒酣以往，高漸離擊筑，荊軻和而歌於市中，相樂也，已而相泣，旁若無人者。荊軻雖游於酒人乎，然其為人沈深好書；其所游諸侯，盡與其賢豪長者相結。其之燕，燕之處士田光先生亦善待之，知其非庸人也。

146 Here the question is Xia Wuqie is only a servant doctor in Qin, how can he know the whole story including the plan of Prince Dan and Jing Ke? So perhaps in this sentence, the “know the affair well” just means the affair of “Jing Ke hurt the King of Qin, which is also false,” in other words, the King is not hurt, rather than know the whole story.

居頃之，會燕太子丹質秦亡歸燕。燕太子丹者，故嘗質於趙，而秦王政生於趙，其少時與丹驩。及政立為秦王，而丹質於秦。秦王之遇燕太子丹不善，故丹怨而亡歸。歸而求為報秦王者，國小，力不能。其後秦日出兵山東以伐齊、楚、三晉，稍蠶食諸侯，且至於燕，燕君臣皆恐禍之至。太子丹患之，問其傅鞠武。

武對曰：“秦地遍天下，威脅韓、魏、趙氏，北有甘泉、谷口之固，南有涇、渭之沃，擅巴、漢之饒，右隴、蜀之山，左關、穀之險，民眾而士厲，兵革有餘。意有所出，則長城之南，易水以北，未有所定也。柰何以見陵之怨，欲批其逆鱗哉！”丹曰：“然則何由？”對曰：“請入圖之。”

居有間，秦將樊於期得罪於秦王，亡之燕，太子受而捨之。鞠武諫曰：“不可。夫以秦王之暴而積怒於燕，足為寒心，又況聞樊將軍之所在乎？是謂‘委肉當餓虎之蹊’也，禍必不振矣！雖有管、晏，不能為之謀也。願太子疾遣樊將軍入匈奴以滅口。請西約三晉，南連齊、楚，北購於單于，其後乃可圖也。”

太子曰：“太傅之計，曠日彌久，心惛然，恐不能須臾。且非獨於此也，夫樊將軍窮困於天下，歸身於丹，丹終不以迫於彊秦而棄所哀憐之交，置之匈奴，是固丹命卒之時也。願太傅更慮之。”

鞠武曰：“夫行危欲求安，造禍而求福，計淺而怨深，連結一人之後交，不顧國家之大害，此所謂‘資怨而助禍’矣。夫以鴻毛燎於爐炭之上，必無事矣。且以鷙鷃之秦，行怨暴之怒，豈足道哉！燕有田光先生，其為人智深而勇沈，可與謀。”

太子曰：“願因太傅而得交於田先生，可乎？”鞠武曰：“敬諾。”出見田先生，道：“太子願圖國事於先生也。”田光曰：“敬奉教。”乃造焉。

太子逢迎，卻行為導，跪而蔽席。田光坐定，左右無人，太子避席而請曰：“燕秦不兩立，願先生留意也。”田光曰：“臣聞騏驎盛壯之時，一日而馳千里；至其衰老，騶馬先之。今太子聞光盛壯之時，不知臣精已消亡矣。雖然，光不敢以圖國事，所善荊卿可使也。”太子曰：“願因先生得結交於荊卿，可乎？”田光曰：“敬諾。”即起，趨出。太子送至門，戒曰：“丹所報，先生所言者，國之大事也，願先生勿泄也！”田光俛而笑曰：“諾。”

偃行見荊卿，曰：“光與子相善，燕國莫不知。今太子聞光壯盛之時，不知吾形已不逮也，幸而教之曰‘燕秦不兩立，願先生留意也。’光竊不自外，言足下於太子也，願足下過太子於宮。”荊軻曰：“謹奉教。”田光曰：“吾聞之，長者為行，不使人疑之。今太子告光曰：‘所言者，國之大事也，願先生勿泄，’是太子疑光也。夫為行而使人疑

之，非節俠也。”欲自殺以激荊卿，曰：“願足下急過太子，言光已死，明不言也。”因遂自刎而死。

荊軻遂見太子，言田光已死，致光之言。太子再拜而跪，膝行流涕，有頃而後言曰：“丹所以誡田先生毋言者，欲以成大事之謀也。今田先生以死明不言，豈丹之心哉！”荊軻坐定，太子避席頓首曰：“田先生不知丹之不肖，使得至前，敢有所道，此天之所以哀燕而不棄其孤也。今秦有貪利之心，而欲不可足也。非盡天下之地，臣海內之王者，其意不厭。今秦已虜韓王，盡納其地。又舉兵南伐楚，北臨趙；王翦將數十萬之眾距漳、鄴，而李信出太原、雲中。趙不能支秦，必入臣，入臣則禍至燕。燕小弱，數困於兵，今計舉國不足以當秦。諸侯服秦，莫敢合從。丹之私計愚，以為誠得天下之勇士使於秦，闕以重利；秦王貪，其勢必得所願矣。誠得劫秦王，使悉反諸侯侵地，若曹沫之與齊桓公，則大善矣；則不可，因而刺殺之。彼秦大將擅兵於外而內有亂，則君臣相疑，以其間諸侯得合從，其破秦必矣。此丹之上願，而不知所委命，唯荊卿留意焉。”久之，荊軻曰：“此國之大事也，臣駑下，恐不足任使。”太子前頓首，固請毋讓，然後許諾。於是尊荊卿為上卿，舍上舍。太子日造門下，供太牢具，異物間進，車騎美女恣荊軻所欲，以順適其意。

久之，荊軻未有行意。秦將王翦破趙，虜趙王，盡收入其地，進兵北略地至燕南界。太子丹恐懼，乃請荊軻曰：“秦兵旦暮渡易水，則雖欲長侍足下，豈可得哉！”荊軻曰：“微太子言，臣願謁之。今行而毋信，則秦未可親也。夫樊將軍，秦王購之金千斤，邑萬家。誠得樊將軍首與燕督亢之地圖，奉獻秦王，秦王必說見臣，臣乃得有以報。”太子曰：“樊將軍窮困來歸丹，丹不忍以己之私而傷長者之意，願足下更慮之！”

荊軻知太子不忍，乃遂私見樊於期曰：“秦之遇將軍可謂深矣，父母宗族皆為戮沒。今聞購將軍首金千斤，邑萬家，將柰何？”於期仰天太息流涕曰：“於期每念之，常痛於骨髓，顧計不知所出耳！”荊軻曰：“今有一言可以解燕國之患，報將軍之仇者，何如？”於期乃前曰：“為之柰何？”荊軻曰：“願得將軍之首以獻秦王，秦王必喜而見臣，臣左手把其袖，右手搃其匈，然則將軍之仇報而燕見陵之愧除矣。將軍豈有意乎？”樊於期偏袒搯腕而進曰：“此臣之日夜切齒腐心也，乃今得聞教！”遂自剄。太子聞之，馳往，伏尸而哭，極哀。既已不可柰何，乃遂盛樊於期首函封之。

於是太子豫求天下之利匕首，得趙人徐夫人匕首，取之百金，使工以藥淬之，以試人，血濡縷，人無不立死者。乃裝為遣荊卿。燕國有勇士秦舞陽，年十三，殺人，人不敢忤視。乃令秦舞陽為副。荊軻有所待，欲與俱；其人居遠未來，而為治行。頃之，

未發，太子遲之，疑其改悔，乃復請曰：“日已盡矣，荊卿豈有意哉？丹請得先遣秦舞陽。”荊軻怒，叱太子曰：“何太子之遣？往而不返者，豎子也！且提一匕首入不測之彊秦，仆所以留者，待吾客與俱。今太子遲之，請辭決矣！”遂發。

太子及賓客知其事者，皆白衣冠以送之。至易水之上，既祖，取道，高漸離擊筑，荊軻和而歌，為變徵之聲，士皆垂淚涕泣。又前而為歌曰：“風蕭蕭兮易水寒，壯士一去兮不復還！”復為羽聲慨，士皆瞋目，發盡上指冠。於是荊軻就車而去，終已不顧。

遂至秦，持千金之資幣物，厚遺秦王寵臣中庶子蒙嘉。嘉為先言於秦王曰：“燕王誠振怖大王之威，不敢舉兵以逆軍吏，願舉國為內臣，比諸侯之列，給貢職如郡縣，而得奉守先王之宗廟。恐懼不敢自陳，謹斬樊於期之頭，及獻燕督亢之地圖，函封，燕王拜送于庭，使使以聞大王，唯大王命之。”

秦王聞之，大喜，乃朝服，設九賓，見燕使者咸陽宮。荊軻奉樊於期頭函，而秦舞陽奉地圖柙，以次進。至陞，秦舞陽色變振恐，群臣怪之。荊軻顧笑舞陽，前謝曰：“北蕃蠻夷之鄙人，未嘗見天子，故振懼。願大王少假借之，使得畢使於前。”秦王謂軻曰：“取舞陽所持地圖。”軻既取圖奏之，秦王發圖，圖窮而匕首見。因左手把秦王之袖，而右手持匕首揜之。未至身，秦王驚，自引而起，袖絕。拔劍，劍長，操其室。時惶急，劍堅，故不可立拔。荊軻逐秦王，秦王環柱而走。群臣皆愕，卒起不意，盡失其度。

而秦法，群臣侍殿上者不得持尺寸之兵；諸郎中執兵皆陳殿下，非有詔召不得上。方急時，不及召下兵，以故荊軻乃逐秦王。而卒惶急，無以擊軻，而以手共搏之。是時侍醫夏無且以其所奉藥囊提荊軻也。秦王方環柱走，卒惶急，不知所為，左右乃曰：“王負劍！”負劍，遂拔以擊荊軻，斷其左股。荊軻廢，乃引其匕首以擣秦王，不中，中桐柱。秦王復擊軻，軻被八創。軻自知事不就，倚柱而笑，箕踞以罵曰：“事所以不成者，以欲生劫之，必得約契以報太子也。”於是左右既前殺軻，秦王不怡者良久。已而論功，賞群臣及當坐者各有差，而賜夏無且黃金二百溢，曰：“無且愛我，乃以藥囊提荊軻也。”

於是秦王大怒，益發兵詣趙，詔王翦軍以伐燕。十月而拔薊城。燕王喜、太子丹等盡率其精兵東保於遼東。秦將李信追擊燕王急，代王嘉乃遺燕王喜書曰：“秦所以尤追燕急者，以太子丹故也。今王誠殺丹獻之秦王，秦王必解，而社稷幸得血食。”其後李信追丹，丹匿衍水中，燕王乃使使斬太子丹，欲獻之秦。秦復進兵攻之。後五年，秦卒滅燕，虜燕王喜。

其明年，秦并天下，立號為皇帝。於是秦逐太子丹、荊軻之客，皆亡。高漸離變

名姓為人庸保，匿作於宋子。久之，作苦，聞其家堂上客擊筑，傍徨不能去。每出言曰：“彼有善有不善。”從者以告其主，曰：“彼庸乃知音，竊言是非。”家丈人召使前擊筑，一坐稱善，賜酒。而高漸離念久隱畏約無窮時，乃退，出其裝匣中筑與其善衣，更容貌而前。舉坐客皆驚，下與抗禮，以為上客。使擊筑而歌，客無不流涕而去者。宋子傳客之，聞於秦始皇。秦始皇召見，人有識者，乃曰：“高漸離也。”秦皇帝惜其善擊筑，重赦之，乃矐其目。使擊筑，未嘗不稱善。稍益近之，高漸離乃以鉛置筑中，復進得近，舉筑撲秦皇帝，不中。於是遂誅高漸離，終身不復近諸侯之人。

魯句踐已聞荊軻之刺秦王，私曰：“嗟乎，惜哉其不講於刺劍之術也！甚矣吾不知人也！曩者吾叱之，彼乃以我為非人也！”

太史公曰：世言荊軻，其稱太子丹之命，“天雨粟，馬生角”也，太過。又言荊軻傷秦王，皆非也。始公孫季功、董生與夏無且游，具知其事，為余道之如是。自曹沫至荊軻五人，此其義或成或不成，然其立意較然，不欺其志，名垂後世，豈妄也哉！

Translation of Shiji:

The Hereditary House of Yanzhaogong

Yan saw Qin already destroyed six states and the Qin troops were just beside the Yi River. The disaster would soon reach the Yan state. Crown Prince Dan secretly hired twenty warriors, and sent Jing Ke to present the map of Du Gang to Qin, catching the chance to assassinate the King of Qing. The King noticed that and killed Ke. He sent General Wang Jian to attack Yan. In the Twenty-ninth Year,¹⁴⁷ Qin attacked and took our city Ji.¹⁴⁸ The King of Yan escaped, moved to live in Liaodong, and killed Dan to present to Qin. In the Thirties Year, Qin destroyed Wei.

Original Texts:

燕見秦且滅六國，秦兵臨易水，禍且至燕。太子丹陰養壯士二十人，使荊軻獻督亢地圖於秦，因襲刺秦王。秦王覺，殺軻，使將軍王翦擊燕。二十九年，秦攻拔我薊，燕王亡，徙居遼東，斬丹以獻秦。三十年，秦滅魏。

In *Zhangguoce*, the record of Jing Ke is very similar to the one in *Shiji*. *Zhangguoce*, also

147 This time line is the Twenty-ninth Year of King Xi of Yan. Here Sima Qian uses the year number of the Yan state to describe the local history.

148 Here Sima Qian writes in the angle of the Yan state, thus he says “our city.”

known as *Strategies of the Warring States* is the book obtained by Han scholar Liu Xiang 劉向 (77-6 BCE). However, the original author of this book has still not yet been verified. It is highly possible for it to be not written by a single author. The story of Jing Ke is in the scroll “Yance” 燕策 (Strategies of Yan). Here is the translation:¹⁴⁹

Translation of Zhanguoce:

Prince Dan of Yan was in the Qin state as a hostage, and he escaped to return. He saw Qin was about to destroy the six states, and the troops already reached the Yi River. He was afraid that the disaster would come. Prince Dan worried about it, and told his teacher Ju Wu said: “Yan and Qin cannot both exist. My teacher, please plan it for me.”

Wu answered: “Qin’s land cover the entire world and threatens the clans of Han, Wei and Zhao. Thus nowhere on the north of Yi River will be secure. Why you touch the dragon’s deadly scale just because of the resent of being humiliated?”¹⁵⁰

The Prince said: “Then what other way is there?”

The teacher said: “Please enter and plan it.”¹⁵¹

After some time had passed, General Fan escaped from Qin and entered Yan.¹⁵² The Prince accepted him.¹⁵³ His teacher suggested said: “You cannot do this. As for the King of

149 During this translation, I will point out some interesting difference with *Shiji* in the footnotes. Basically these two texts are the same, but there are still details we can pay attention to.

150 Comparing with *Shiji*, here *Zhanguoce* does not have Ju Wu’s analysis of the situation.

151 Both in *Shiji* and *Zhanguoce*, Ju Wu’s answer is “*qing ru tu zhi*” 請入圖之, but this sentence can have two different meanings. If we read it as “*qing, ru tu zhi*” 請, 入圖之, then it means “please let me return and rethink about it” just as my translation in *Shiji*, which means Ju Wu will rethink it and report to the Prince later. But if we read it as “*qing ru, tu zhi*” 請入, 圖之, then it means “please enter and plan it,” which means Ju Wu invite Prince Guang enter the house and plan it together. Both two readings can make sense. So I put different translations in different stories. Considering the footnote in *Zhanguoce* (p. 1129) mentions this may ask Prince Dan to enter and have a rest, I put the second translation here.

152 In *Shiji*, it mentions General Fan offends the King of Qin and escapes. But in *Zhanguoce*, it only says he escape and ignores the reason.

153 *Shiji* uses the word “*she*” 捨 to points the Prince provides a house for him. And here it only says the Prince accepts him, without describing the treatment.

Qin's anger and his old resent against Yan, is already enough to chill the heart. How much more will that be when he heard General Fan is here? That is throwing meat to block the hungry tiger's path, and the disaster will be beyond remedy. Even if you have Guan Zhong and Yan Ying, they cannot make a plan for you. My Prince, please immediately send General Fan to Xiongnu to close his mouth. Then please make an agreement with the three Jin states on the west, make alliance with Qi and Chu on the north, and come to terms with the Chanyu to the north.¹⁵⁴ Only after that, we can have our plan."

Prince Dan said: "My teacher's plan is time-consuming. My heart is anxious, and I'm afraid I cannot wait that long. And that is not the only reason. It is that when General Fan was denied shelter by the entire world, he turned to me. I will never abandon an acquaintance who I love and pity and sent him to Xiongnu because of the pressure from the mighty Qin. When that happen will surely be the day I die. I hope you can consider it again, my teacher."

Ju Wu said: "In the Yan state, there is Sir Tian Guang, who is deep in thought and profoundly daring. You can consult with him."

The Prince said: "I hope I can make the acquaintance of sir Tian through you, my teacher. Is that possible?"

Ju Wu said: "I shall respectfully comply."

He left and met Sir Tian, said: "The Crown Prince hopes to consult the state affair with you."

Tian Guang said: "I respectfully follow his instructions." and went there.

The Prince welcomed him, walked backwards to lead him inside, knelt down and dusted off the mat. Sir Tian took his seat, and there were no one else standing beside him.

The Prince moved off his mat and made the request: "Yan and Qin cannot both exist. Sir, please devote your attention to this."

154 *Shiji* uses the word "gou" 購 while *Zhanguoce* uses "jiang" 講. The two words have the same meaning.

Tian Guang said: “I have heard that, when the good horse was in its prime, it can run a thousand *li* in one day; but when it becomes old, even the bad horses can surpass it. Now, my Prince that you have heard of my prime, but you have not realized that my vigor has vanished. Although I do not dare to destroy the states affair,¹⁵⁵ my friend, Jing Ke, can be employed.”

The Prince said: “I hope that I can make the acquaintance of Jing Ke through you, sir. Is that possible?”

Tian Guang said: “I will respectfully comply.” As soon as he rose up, he begin to walk out in small steps.

The Prince accompanied him to the gate, and said: “What I reported to you and what you spoke to me were big affairs of our state. Sir, please do not disclose it to others.”

Tian Guang bowed down and laughed: “Of course.”

Bowed with respect,¹⁵⁶ he met Jing Ke, said: “My friendship with you is known to all in the Yan state. Now the Prince heard about my prime, but he did not know my frame is failing. He graced me with his presence and told me: ‘Yan and Qin cannot both exist. Sir, please devote your attention to this.’ Presuming upon our friendship, I spoke of you to the Prince. I hope you can call on him at the palace.”

Jing Ke answered: “I will respectfully follow your words.”

Tian Guang then said: “I have heard that, the actions of an honorable man do not cause the others to doubt him. Today the Prince told me: ‘What I reported to you and what you spoke to me were big affairs of our state. Sir, please do not disclose to others.’ That is the Prince doubting me. When ones actions cause the others to doubt him, he is not a

155 In this sentence, *Shiji* uses “*tu*” 圖 while *Zhanguoce* uses “*fa*” 乏, this two words have very different meaning. “*Tu*” means plan, and “*fa*” means destroy. In *Zhanguoce*, Tian Guang’s meaning is “if you ask me to plan it for you, surly it will not success” so he recommend Jing Ke.

156 About the “*lou*” 僂 here, it also have two readings. One is like my translation in *Shiji*, he bows because of his age. However the footnote in *Zhanguoce* (p. 1131) points out it may because of his represent to Jing Ke. Thus I put the second meaning here.

high-principled gallant.”

At that time, he wanted to commit suicide to stir Jing Ke, thus he said: “I hope that you will hasten to call on the prince, and tell him I have already died to demonstrate my silence.” Then Tian Guang slit his own throat.

Jing Ke then met the Prince, told him that Tian Guang had already died to demonstrate his silence. The Prince kneeled and bowed twice, moving on his knees and weeping. Only after some time, he spoke saying: “The reason I warned Sir Tian is because I wanted our big plan to succeed. Now Sir Tian uses death to demonstrate his silence, how could that have been my intention?”

After Jing Ke was seated, the Prince removed himself from his mat and knocked his forehead on the ground, said: “Sir Tian, being ignorant of my lack of worth, has made it possible for you to come and for us to talk. This is the Heaven taking pity on Yan and does not abandon its orphan.¹⁵⁷ Now Qin has the heart of greedy, and its desires can never be satisfied. Not until it exhausted the worlds’ lands and enslaved the world’s kings will it be satisfied. Now Qin has already captured the King of Han, and incorporated all of his land. Again it raised troops to attack Chu in the south and tower over Zhao in the north. Wang Jian is leading hundreds of thousands men to Zhang and Ye. Li Xin is making expedition to Taiyuan and Yunzhong. When Zhao is unable to resist Qin, it will sure submit as a vassal to us. When it submits as a vassal, the disaster is sure to come to Yan. Yan is small and weak, has several times been surrounded by troops. Now I have calculated that even the resources of the entire state cannot stop Qin. The other lords have submitted to Qin and not dare to form Vertical Alliance. By my own calculations, I foolishly suggested that if we can get the bravest knight of the world, and send him to Qin with great profit. The King of Qin is greedy, so he is

157 About the “*gu*” 孤 here, according to the footnotes in *Zhanguoce* (p. 1133), since King Xi of Yan is still alive, it does not mean the son lost his parents. Also Prince Dan is only a prince at that time (not a king), so he cannot call himself “*gu*.” Here I believe this is used to describe himself helpless.

sure to desire this. If we are then able to catch the King of Qin, and force him to return all the lands he took from the other lords, just like what Cao Mo did to Duke Huan of Qi, and that will be very good. If that is not possible, then we can kill him. Since the great generals of Qin are leading army abroad and when strife arises at home, the lord and ministers will doubt each other. Using that to estrange Qin and other feudal lords and those lords can form the Vertical Alliance.¹⁵⁸ Then surely we will defeat Qin. This is my greatest hope, but I do not know to whom I can entrust it. Sir, please consider this.”

The Prince moved forward and knocked his forehead on the ground, doggedly imploring him not to decline. So that in the end Jing Ke agreed. The Prince then made Jing Qing the Senior Minister and housed him with the best house. The Prince daily visited him, supplied him with Tailao food, and frequently gifted him with novel objects. Chariots, horses, and beautiful women, pandering to Jing Ke’s every wish, in order to meet his expectations.

After a long time, Jing Qing showed no signs of setting out. General Wang Jian of Qin defeated Zhao, captured the King of Zhao, and got all its land. The troops moved north and took over territories, until it reached the southern border of Yan.

Prince Dan was afraid and implored Jing Qing saying: “Qin’s troops will cross the Yi River any day. At that time, even though I wish to continue accompanying you, will I be able to?”¹⁵⁹

Jing Qing said: “Even if you had not spoken, I will also do my best. But now I set off without a token of trust, I will not be able to get close to Qin. As for General Fan, the King of

158 In *Shiji*, the “*jian*” 間 means “the opening” or “the chance.” But here, since the author repeat the word “*zhuhou*” 諸侯 twice, so the sentence changes to “using this to estrange the lords” and “*jian*” 間 here is a verb, which means “estrange.”

159 About this sentence “*qi ke de zai*” 豈可得哉, the different tone may lead different translation. In my translation in *Shiji*, I translate it “*qi ke de zai!*” 豈可得哉! as “I will not be able to do it.” But here “*qi ke de zai?*” 豈可得哉? Can be translated as “will I be able to do that?” Both two tones can make sense, so I follow the two original texts’ punctuation to do the translation.

Qin offered a thousand *jin* of gold and a manor of ten thousand household to get him. If I can get the head of General Fan and the map of Dugang area of Yan, present them to the King of Qin, the King will surely be happy to see me. Then, I will have the chance to repay you.”

The Prince said: “General Fan came to me in the time of trouble, and I could not bear to violate the elder’s intention over my private affairs. Sir, please consider it once more.”

Jing Ke knew that the Prince could not bear it, so he met Fan Wuji in private, and said: “Qin’s treatment to General can be called cruel indeed; your parents and kinsmen have all been killed. Now I heard the King put a bounty of a thousand *jin* of gold and ten thousands household on your head. What will you do?”

General Fan looked up and sighed deeply, cried and said: “Each time I think of it, the pain cuts to my marrow. It is just because I don’t have a plan to revenge!”

Jing Ke said: “Now I have a word to solve the worry of Yan, and take your revenge, how would that be?”

Fan Wuji then moved forward and asked: “What is it?”

Jing Ke said: “I wish to have your head and present it to the King of Qin, and the King will surely be happy to meet me. I will catch his sleeve with my left hand, and stab him in the chest with my right hand. Then, your revenge will be repaid and Yan’s humiliation will be erased. Do you have the same thought?”

Fan Wuji bared one shoulder, caught his wrist and moved forward said: “That is what I day and night gnashed my teeth and seared my heart for!¹⁶⁰ At last I have been able to hear your instruction!” Then he slit his own throat.

When the Prince heard it, he rushed there, leaned over the corpse, and mourned in deep sorrow. Since it already happened and there was nothing he could do, finally he put Fan Wuji’s head in a box and sealed it.

160 Here *Shiji* uses the word “*fu*” 腐 while *Zhangguoce* uses “*fu*” 拊. These two words has the same meaning here.

At that time, the Prince looked for the sharpest dagger in the world before, and he found the dagger from Xu Furen of Zhao. He bought it with a hundred gold, and asked the worker to coat it with poison. When he tried it on human, even when the blood was just enough to stain one silk thread, none of them avoid dying immediately. Then he prepared it for the purpose of sending Jing Ke off. In the Yan state, there was a brave knight called Qin Wuyang. He killed man only at the age of twelve.¹⁶¹ The people did not dare to look at him directly. The Prince then asked him to be the assistant of Jing Ke. Jing Ke was waiting for someone, intending to have him go along. That man lived at a distance and had not yet arrived, so Jing Ke stayed for him.

After some time, Jing Ke still did not set off. The Prince felt it too late, and considered Jing Ke may change his mind. He again went to ask: “There is no time left, Jing Ke do you still have the mind on that? I would request to send Qin Wuyang first.”

Jing Ke was angered and roared at the Prince: “Today,¹⁶² one who sets off without return is a whelp! Now I will enter the unfathomably mighty Qin only with a single dagger. The reason I am staying here, is because I am waiting for my retainer to go along. Now, since you feel it is late, I will take my leave!” Then he set out.

The Prince and the other retainers who knew this affair, all wore the white robes and caps to see them off. They reached the Yi River, performed setting-out sacrifice and chose the route. Gao Jianli struck the dulcimer, and Jing Ke sang in harmony in the key of a minus Zheng. All the knights were weeping. Jing Ke then went forward and sang: “The wind cries and the Yi River is cold. The bold man leaves and he will never return!” He then again performed cries in key of Yu. All the knights glared their eyes and the hair bristled beneath

161 In *Shiji*, he kills at the age of thirteen. I don't think his age will make sense, but I still point out this difference.

162 In *Zhanguoce*, here has the phrase “*jinri*” 今日 before this sentence. This makes the understanding even more difficult. I still believe Jing Ke's words means if he escapes then he is a whelp. And adding today here may be the reply for the Prince feeling it late.

the caps. Jing Ke then mounted the chariot and left. He never looked back.

Then they arrived at Qin, and generously presented gifts worth a thousand gold to the Palace Cadet, Meng Jia, who is the King's favorite minister. Jia then spoke first to the King of Qin, saying: "The King of Yan trembles before your power and does not dare to raise troops to oppose you, my king."¹⁶³ He wishes to let his state be our vassal, place it among our other feudal lords and pay tribute like a prefecture commandery, in order to maintain and sacrifice at the temple of his ancestors. He does not dare to speak in person, so he cut off the head of Fan Wuji, and brought it with the map of Dugang area. These were sealed in boxes and send to our court. He sent a messenger to hear from you. The messenger is now waiting for your order, my King."

The King of Qin heard it, and he was very happy. Then he put on the court robe and had the nine levels officials arrayed to receive the messenger of Yan in the palace of Xianyang. Jing Ke held the box contained the head of Fan Wuji and Qin Wuyang held the box of map. They went in one after the other.

When they reached the steps, Qin Wuyang turned pale and trembled. The officials felt him strange. Jing Ke looked at Wuyang, smiled, moved forward and apologized: "This is a barbarian person from the north, so he has never seen the Son of Heaven who shocked even the ones out of states. My King, please please be a little tolerant of him and allow him to fulfill his mission."

The King of Qin told Jing Ke: "Take that map Wuyang holds." Jing Ke then took the map and presented it. The King unrolled the map. When the map reached the end, the dagger appeared.

Then Jing Ke caught the sleeve of King with his left hand, grabbed the dagger and stabbed the King's chest in his right hand. Before the dagger touched his chest, the King was

¹⁶³ In *Shiji*, here uses the word "*junli*" 軍吏 and here is "*dawang*" 大王. So *Shiji*'s translation is "our army" and here is "you, my king."

startled and stood up. His sleeve was torn off. He tried to pull out his sword, but it was too long, so he could only grasp its scabbard. Since he was hurried at that time and sword fit tightly, so he could not draw it immediately. Jing Ke pursued the King of Qin, and the King escaped around the pillars. The officials were all startled, because this was sudden and unexpected. They all lost their composure.

And as for the law of Qin, the officials who entered the palace could not hold even the smallest weapon. All the guards who hold weapons were arrayed below the hall, and they were not able to enter without a command. In this urgent moment, the King was not able to command the troops. For this reason Jing Ke could pursue the King. Finally in urgency, the officials, who had no weapons to attack Jing Ke, together struck him with bare hands. At that time, the servant doctor Xia Wuqie threw the medicine bag he held at Jing Ke.

The King of Qin had just run around the pillars. He was in a hurry and did not know what to do. The attendants shouted: “King, put the sword on your back! King, put the sword on your back!” Once the King put it on his back, he was able to draw it and attack Jing Ke, cutting open his left leg.

Jing Ke collapsed, then drew his dagger and threw it at the King. It missed him, and hit the bronze pillar. The King of Qin attacked Jing Ke again, and Jing Ke was wounded eight times.

Ke knew his affair would not succeed, thus he laughed leaning against a pillar. Then he sat with the leg spread and cursed: “The reason my attempt failed was because I want to catch you alive, in order to obtain a convent and repay the Prince.”

The guards already moved forward and killed Jing Ke. The King still felt dizziness¹⁶⁴ for a long time. After that he awarded all officials according to their contributions. He also

164 In *Shiji*, Sima Qian uses the word “*buyi*” 不怡, which means “discomfort.” But here is the word “*muxuan*” 目眩, which translated as “dizziness” – maybe because he runs around the pillar for too many cycles.

presented Xia Wuqie two hundred *yi* of gold, said: “Wuqie loves me, and thus he threw his medicine bag at Jing Ke.”

Thus Qin was in great anger of Yan, and sent more troops to Zhao, ordered Wang Jian to lead them and attack Yan. In the tenth month they seized the Ji city. King Xi of Yan, Prince Dan and the others all led their finest troops east to defend in Liaodong. General Li Xin of Qin chased the King of Yan. The King was in a hurry, so he followed the plan of King Jia of Dai, killed Prince Dan and wanted to send him to Qin. Qin again sent troops to attack him. Five years later, Qin completely destroyed Yan and captured King Xi of Yan. Qin conquered the entire real.¹⁶⁵

After that, Gao Jianli, the guest of Jing Ke, was able to see the Emperor of Qin because of his skill of striking dulcimer. Then he used his dulcimer to hit the Emperor of Qin, wanted to take revenge for Yan. He missed the Emperor and was killed.¹⁶⁶

Original Texts:

燕太子丹質於秦，亡歸。見秦且滅六國，兵以臨易水，恐其禍至。太子丹患之，謂其太傅鞠武曰：“燕秦不兩立，愿太傅幸而圖之。”武對曰：“秦地邊天下，威脅韓、魏、趙氏，則易水以北，為有所定也。奈何以見陵之怨，欲排其逆鱗哉？”太子曰：“然則何由？”太傅曰：“請入，圖之。”

居之有間，樊將軍亡秦之燕，太子容之。太傅鞠武諫曰：“不可。夫秦王之暴，而積怨於燕，足為寒心，又況聞樊將軍之在乎！是以委肉當餓虎之蹊，禍必不振矣！雖有管、晏，不能為謀。愿太子急遣樊將軍入匈奴以滅口。請西約三晉，南連齊、楚，北講於單於，然後乃可圖也。”太子丹曰：“太傅之計，曠日彌久，心昏然，恐不能須臾。且非獨於此也。夫樊將軍困窮於天下，歸身於丹，丹終不迫於強秦，二棄所哀戀之交置之匈奴，是丹命固卒之時也。愿太傅更慮之。”鞠武曰：“燕有田光先生者，其智深，其勇沉，可與之謀也。”太子曰：“愿因太傅交於田先生，可乎？”鞠武曰：“敬諾。”出見田光，道太子曰：“愿圖國事於先生。”田光曰：“敬奉教。”乃造焉。

165 According to “Liuguo nianbiao” 六国年表 in *Shiji*, Qin does not conquer the entire world at this time. It still need to destroy Qi 齊 in the next year.

166 This plot is also recorded in *Shiji*, but much detailed then this one.

太子跪而逢迎，卻行為道，跪而拂席。田先生坐定，左右無人，太子避席而且曰：“燕、秦不兩立，愿先生留意也。”田光曰：“臣聞騏驎盛壯之時，一日而馳千里。至其衰也，駑馬先之。今太子聞光壯盛之時，不知吾精已消亡矣。雖然，光不敢以乏國事也。所善荊軻，可使也。”太子曰：“愿因先生得愿交於荊軻，可乎？”田光曰：“敬諾。”即起趨出。太子送之至門，曰：“丹所報，先生所言者，國大事也，愿先生勿泄也。”田光俯而笑曰：“諾。”

偻行見荊軻，曰：“光與子相善，燕國莫不知。今太子聞光壯盛之時，不知吾形已不逮也，幸而教之曰：‘燕、秦不兩立，愿先生留意也。’光竊不自外，言足下於太子，愿足下過太子於宮。”荊軻曰：“謹奉教。”田光曰：“光聞長者之行，不使人疑之，今太子約光曰：‘所言者，國之大事也，愿先生勿泄也。’是太子疑光也。夫為行使人疑之，非節俠士也。”於自殺以激荊軻，曰：“愿足下急過太子，言光已死，明不言也。”遂自剄而死。

軻見太子，言田光已死，明不言也。太子再拜而跪，膝下行流涕，有頃而後言曰：“單所請田先生無言者，欲以生大事之謀，今田先生以死明不泄言，豈丹之心哉？”荊軻坐定，太子避席頓首曰：“田先生不致丹不肖，使得至前，愿有所道，此天所以哀燕不棄其孤也。今秦有貪饕之心，而欲不可足也。非盡天下之地，臣海內之王者，其意不餍。今秦已虜韓王，盡納其地，又舉兵南伐楚，北臨趙。王翦將數十萬之眾臨漳、鄴，而李信出太原，云中。趙不能支秦，必入臣。入臣，則禍至燕。燕小弱，數困於兵，今計舉國不足以當秦。諸侯服秦，莫敢合從。丹之私計，愚以為誠得天下之勇士，使於秦，窺以重利，秦王貪其贄，必得所愿矣。誠得劫秦王，使悉反諸侯之侵地，若曹沫之與齊桓公，則大善矣；則不可，因而刺殺之。彼大將擅兵與外，而內有大亂，則君臣相疑。以其間諸侯，諸侯得合從，其償破秦必矣。此丹之上愿，而不知所以委命，唯荊卿留意焉。”太子前頓首，固請無讓。然後許諾。於是尊荊軻為上卿，舍上舍，太子日日造問，供太牢異物，間進車騎美女，恣荊軻所欲，以順適其意。

久之，荊卿未有行意。秦將王翦破趙，虜趙王，盡收其地，進兵北略地，至燕南界。太子丹恐懼，乃請荊卿曰：“秦兵旦暮渡易水，則雖欲長侍足下，可豈可得哉？”荊卿曰：“微太子言，臣愿得謁之。今行而無信，則秦未可親也。夫今樊將軍，秦王購之金千斤，邑萬家。誠能得樊將軍首，與燕督之地圖獻秦王，秦王必說見臣，臣乃得有以報太子。”太子曰：“樊將軍以窮困來歸丹，丹不忍以己之私，而傷長者之意，愿足下更慮之。”

荊軻知太子不忍，乃遂私見樊於期曰：“秦之遇將軍，可謂深矣。父母宗族，皆為戮沒。今聞購將軍之首，金千斤，邑萬家，將奈何？”樊將軍仰天太息流涕曰：“吾每念，常痛於骨髓，顧計不知所出耳。”軻曰：“今有一言，可以解燕國之患，而報將軍之讎者，何如？”樊於期乃前曰：“為之奈何？”荊軻曰：“愿得將軍之首以獻秦，秦王必喜而善見臣，臣左受拔其袖，而右手拑抗其胸，然則將軍之仇報，而燕國見陵之恥除矣。將軍豈有意與？”樊於期偏袒扼腕而進曰：“此臣日夜切齒拊心也，乃今得聞教。”遂自刎。太子聞之馳往，伏尸而哭，極哀。既已，無可奈何，乃遂收盛樊於期之首，函封之。

於是，太子預求天下之利匕首，得趙人徐夫人之匕首，取之百金，使工以藥淬之，以試人，血汝縷，人無不立死者。乃為裝遣荊軻。燕國有勇士秦武陽，年十二，殺人，人不敢與忤視。乃令秦武陽為副。荊軻有所待，欲俱，其人居遠未來，而為留待。頃之未發，太子遲之，疑其有改悔，乃復請之曰：“日以盡矣，荊卿豈無意哉？丹請先遣秦武陽。”荊軻怒，叱太子曰：“今日往而不反者，豎子也！今提一匕首入不測之強秦，仆所以留者，待吾客與俱。今太子遲之，請辭決矣！”遂發。

太子及賓客知其事者，皆白衣冠以送之。至易水上，既祖，取道。高漸離擊筑，荊軻和而歌，為變徵之聲，士皆垂淚涕泣。又前而為歌曰：“風蕭蕭兮易水寒，壯士一去兮不復還！”復為慷慨羽聲，士皆瞋目，發盡上指冠。於是荊軻遂就車而去，終已不顧。

既至秦，持千金之資幣物，厚遺秦王寵臣中庶子蒙嘉。嘉為先言於秦王曰：“燕王誠振畏慕大王之威，不敢興兵以拒大王，愿舉國為內臣，比諸侯之列，給貢職如郡縣，而得奉守先王之宗廟。恐懼不敢自陳，謹斬樊於期頭，及獻燕之督亢之地圖，函封，燕王拜送於庭，使使以聞大王。唯大王命之。”

秦王聞之，大喜。乃朝服，設九賓，見燕使者咸陽宮。荊軻奉樊於期頭函，而秦武陽奉地圖匣，以次進至陛下。秦武陽色變振恐，群臣怪之，荊軻顧笑武陽，前為謝曰：“北蠻夷之鄙人，未嘗見天子，國外振懾，愿大王少假借之，使畢使於前。”秦王謂軻曰：“取武陽所持圖。”軻既取圖奉之，發圖，圖窮而匕首見。因左手拔秦王之袖，右持匕首拑抗之。未至身，秦王驚，自引而起，絕袖。拔劍，劍長，揜其室。時怨急，劍堅，故不可立拔。荊軻逐秦王，秦王還柱而走。群臣驚愕，卒起不意，盡失其度。而秦法，群臣侍殿上者，不得持尺兵。諸郎中執兵，皆陳殿下，非有詔不得上。方急時，不及召下兵，以故荊軻逐秦王，而卒惶急無以擊軻，而乃以手共搏之。是時，侍醫夏無且，以其所奉藥囊體軻。秦王之方還柱走，卒惶急不知所為，左右乃曰：“王負劍！王負劍！”

遂拔以擊荊軻，斷其左股。荊軻廢，乃引其匕首，提秦王，不中，中柱。秦王復擊軻，被八創。軻自知事不就，倚柱而笑，箕踞以罵曰：“事所以不成者，乃欲以生劫之，必得約契以報太子也。”左右既前斬荊軻，秦王目眩良久。而論功賞群臣及當坐者，各有差。而賜夏無且黃金二百鎰，曰：“無且愛我，乃以藥囊提軻也。”

於是，秦大怒燕，益發兵詣趙，詔王翦軍以伐燕。十月而拔燕薊城。燕王喜、太子丹等，皆率其精兵東保於遼東。秦將李信追擊燕王，王急，用代王嘉計，殺太子丹，欲獻之秦。秦復進兵攻之。五歲而卒滅燕國，而虜燕王喜。秦兼天下。

其後荊軻客高漸離以擊筑見秦皇帝，而以筑擊秦皇帝，為燕報仇，不中而死。

Comparing with *Shiji* and *Zhanguoce*, *Yandanzi* seems more like a kind of novel rather than a historical record. The author of this book is also verified. The whole book, which is divided into three scrolls, only focuses on the story of Prince Dan and Jing Ke. The first scroll is about how the Prince escaped from Qin, and the second one about his meeting with Jing Ke. The last one is about Jing Ke's attempt of assassination. Here I will provide the translation of the last two scrolls:

Translation of Yandanzi:

Yandanzi: Scroll Two

Tian Guang met the Prince. The Prince stood beside the stair to welcome him, greeting him and bowing twice. After he is seated, Prince Dan said: “My teacher¹⁶⁷ did not consider here a barbarian state and Dan unworthy, but asked you, sir, to come to our humble city. Now the Yan state is in the very remote area of North, adjacent to the barbarian area, but you, sir, do not deem it an embarrassment. That I, Dan, am able to serve you in your presence and witness your jade-like appearance goes to show that the divine spirits of the previous generations are protecting and aiding the Yan state, and make you, sir, agree to humble yourself and come here.”

Tian Guang said: “Ever since I tied my hair and became an adult, and till today, I only had the fortune to admire the lofty behavior of my Prince and praise my Prince's excellent

167 This teacher here is Ju Wu.

name. What is that my Prince wants to instruct me?”¹⁶⁸

The Prince moved forward on his knees and said with tears: “Dan had been a hostage in Qin, and Qin treated me very rudely. Day and night I have been anxious and wanted to seek retribution. Considering the population, Qin has more than us; considering the strength, we are weaker than Qin. I want to call for a Vertical Alliance, but my heart knows I cannot do it. Constantly, I don’t know the taste while eating, and cannot rest in bed while sleeping. Even if Yan is destroyed together with Qin, that would be extinguished ash reanimated or bone revived. Sir, please think about it.”

Tian Guang said: “This is the affair of the state, please let me think about it.” Then Tian Guang was housed in the best lodging. The Prince sent him food three times a day and kept on visiting him. It was like this for three months.¹⁶⁹

The Prince felt strange about his not having any plans, so he met Guang and let retainers out, asking: “You, sir, already showed your sympathy to me and promised a good plan. I listened by your side for three months like this. Sir, do you have something on your mind?”

Tian Guang said: “Even if you had not spoken, I will surely do my best. I have heard that, when the good horse is young, it can run a thousand *li* easily.¹⁷⁰ But when it old and retired, it cannot run on the path.¹⁷¹ I am already old when Prince heard me. I want to give you a good plan, but you cannot do it.¹⁷² I want to use my strength to serve you, but I cannot do that. However, I have secretly watched your retainers, and there is no one we can use. As

168 Different from *Shiji* and *Zhanguoce*, here in *Yandanzi* we can see the dialogs between Tian Guang and the Prince in a different way. Tian Guang’s words here shows he have admired the Prince for a long time. Also it is more possible to be guest words.

169 This plot is not recorded in *Shiji* and *Zhanguoce*.

170 “*Qing*” 輕 means “light,” here it shows “can do something easily” like rise something light. Thus “*li qing qianli*” 力輕千里 means “can run a thousand *li* easily.”

171 “*Qudao*” 取道 here means “on the path,” describing the old horse is even too weak to move from the horse stable to the path.

172 Here the “plan” maybe something like Vertical Alliance, and just like the Prince said before, he cannot do that. Thus Tian Guang has words like this.

for Xia Fu, he is a man whose bravery is in his blood, so his face turns red when he is angry. As for Song Yi, he is a man whose bravery is in his pulse, so his face turns green when he is angry. As for Wuyang, he is a man whose bravery is in his bone, so his face turns white when he is angry. I know a man, Jin Ke, whose bravery is in his spirit, so his face will not change when he is angry.¹⁷³ This man is broadly learned and has a good memory, and is very strong in body. He cares not about the small affairs and wants to achieve great success. He lived in Wei and helped more than ten worthy officials in their difficulties.¹⁷⁴ For his other affairs, they are small and are not worthy mentioning. If the Prince wants to have a plan, then there is no one else except him.”

The Prince descended from the mat and bowed twice, and said: “If I can make friend with Sir Jin through your auspice, then the soil and grain alters of Yan can exist for long without being destroyed. May you, sir, bring this to fruition.” Tian Guang then went on his way.

The Prince saw him off personally, took Guang’s hand and said: “This is the state’s affair, please don’t leak it.”

Guang smiled and said: “Of course.”

Afterwards Tian Guang met Jing Ke and said: “I, Guang, did not consider myself unworthy, and introduced you to the Prince. As for the Prince of Yan, he is really the best lord of the world,¹⁷⁵ and he admires you. Sir, please do not doubt it.”

Jing Ke said: “For my lowest aspiration, I often say if our thoughts are the same, I will not look back even if my whole body perishes for you; but if our thoughts are different, I will

173 This different style of courage is also a very famous and interesting plot. It can be found in novels from later periods, such as *Dongzhou lieguo zhi* 東周列國志.

174 Different from *Shiji*’s describing Jing Ke to be a coward, here he is already a famous warrior when Tian Guang recommends him to the Prince.

175 “*Tianxia zhi shi*” 天下之士 means the best “*shi*” in the world. Normally we will translate “*shi*” as “knight”, but it may not suitable to use it to describe the Prince. Thus I use the word “lord” to show his status.

not spend even a hair. Now you, sir, ask me to make friend with the Prince, I will respectfully follow without violation.”

Tian Guang told Jing Ke, saying: “I have heard that, the real knight¹⁷⁶ never makes others suspect. When the Prince sent me off, he said this is the state’s affair and I may not leak it. This is him suspecting me. Being suspected but still living in the world, this is what I am ashamed for.” He faced Ke, swallowed his tongue, and died.¹⁷⁷

Ke then went to the Yan state.

Original Text:

田光見太子，太子側階而迎，迎而再拜。坐定，太子丹曰：“傳不以蠻域而丹不肖，乃使先生來降弊邑，今燕國僻在北陲，比於蠻域，而先生不羞之。丹得侍左右，觀見玉顏，斯乃上世神靈，保佑燕國，令先生設降辱焉。”田光曰：“結髮立身，以至於今，徒慕太子之高行，美太子之令名耳。太子將何以教之？”太子膝行而前，涕淚橫流曰：“丹嘗質於秦，秦遇丹無禮，日夜焦心，思欲復之。論眾則秦多，計強則燕弱。欲曰合從，心復不能。常食不識位、寢不安席。縱令燕秦同日而亡，則為死灰復燃，白骨更生。願先生圖之。”田光曰：“此國事也，請得思之。”於是舍光上館。太子三時進食，存問不絕，如是三月。

太子怪其無說，就光辟左右，問曰：“先生既垂哀恤，許惠嘉謀。側身傾聽，三月於斯，先生豈有意歟？”田光曰：“微太子言，固將竭之。臣聞騏驎之少，力輕千里，及其罷朽，不能取道。太子聞臣時已老矣。欲為太子良謀，則太子不能；欲奮筋力，則臣不能。然竊觀太子客無可用者，夏扶、血勇之人，怒而面赤；宋臆、脈勇之人，怒而面青；武陽、骨勇之人，怒而面白。光所知荊軻、神勇之人，怒而色不變，為人博聞強記，體烈骨壯，不拘小節，欲立大功。嘗家於衛，脫賢大夫之急十有餘人，其餘庸庸不可稱。太子欲圖事，非此人莫可。”太子下席再拜曰：“若因先生之靈，得交於荊君，則燕國社稷長為不滅。唯先生成之。”田光遂行。太子自送，執光手曰：“此國事，願勿洩之！”光笑曰：“諾。”

176 Here the “*shi*” 士 is Tian Guang, so I use “knight” as usual.

177 Different from slitting his own throat, here *Yandanzi* gives a new terrible way of death. But swallowing his tongue can show Tian Guang’s intention to “keep silence.” That may be why *Yandanzi* describes this death in this specific way.

遂見荊軻，曰：“光不自度不肖，達足下於太子。夫燕太子，真天下之士也，傾心於足下，願足下勿疑焉。”荊軻曰：“有鄙志，常謂心合意等，沒身不顧，情有乖異，一毛不拔。今先生令交於太子，敬諾不違。”田光謂軻曰：“蓋聞士不為人所疑。太子送光之時，言此國事，願勿洩，此疑光也。是疑而生於世，光所羞也。”向軻吞舌而死。軻遂之燕。

Translation of Yandanzi:

Yandanzi Scroll Three

Jing Ke arrived at Yan, the Prince drove the chariot personally and left the seat on the left open for him. Jing Ke was relaxed and did not show modest.¹⁷⁸

When they have arrived and seated, the room was full of guests. Ke said: “Tian Guang praised the kind behaviors of prince, and claimed that you possess extraordinary facility. Your lofty conduct can reach the sky and the praise of you fills my ears. When I left the capital of Wei, I looked afar at the path to Yan. Meeting dangers, I did not consider it laborious; looking afar the distance, I did not think it remote. Now the Prince treats me with the grace of an old guest, welcomes me with the respect of new man. The reason I did not show any modesty is because I believe in the person who really knows me.”

The Prince said: “How is sir Tian?”

Ke said: “Guang, when he sent me off, said that you warned him about the state affair. He felt ashamed about not being trusted and killed himself facing my by swallowing his tongue.”

The Prince was shocked and turned pale, sighed and weeped saying: “Can the reason that I warned him be I that suspected him? Now that he had killed himself makes me want to resign myself from the world.” For a long time, he was at a loss and felt distressed.

On the Minshi day¹⁷⁹ he prepared a banquet for Jing Ke. At the height of the banquet,

178 Jing Ke's rude behavior may because of his angry of Prince Dan's word, which causes Tian Guang's death. Or perhaps he is testing the Prince.

179 As for these phrase “*minshiri*” 民氏日, it is difficult to infer its meaning. In the

the Prince rose and gave a toast.

Xia Fu moved forward and asked: “I have heard that when one’s service is not praised in the hometown, it cannot be called a success; when a horse does not have the skill to pull the chariot, it cannot be called good. Now Sir Jing comes from a far distance, what do you want to teach the Prince?” He wanted to make Jing Ke feel humiliated.¹⁸⁰

Jing Ke said: “The knight who has extraordinary success does not need to responsive to his hometown; and the horse that exhibit the treats of being capable of running a thousand *li*, why is there the need to pull the chariot. In the past, when Lü Wang was a butcher and fisherman, he was the lowest man in the world. But when he met King Wen, he became the teacher of the Zhou. When the good horse pulls the salt carriage, it is worse than the bad horse. But when it met Bo Le, it has the ability of running a thousand *li*. As for these, is it that they were in their hometowns and then revealed their skills or pulling the carriage and then distinguished themselves as good horses?”

Xia Fu asked Ke saying: “Then what will you teach the Prince?”

Ke said: “I will let Yan continuing the path of Duke Zhao, following the teaching of “Gan Tang.”¹⁸¹ Above I want to make the Three Kings turns into four; below I want to make the Five Lords turns into six. What do you think about it?” All the guests praised it as good.

Until the end of banquet, no one could defeat Jing Ke.¹⁸² The Prince was very happy

footnotes of *Yandanzi* (p. 10), it argues it maybe the clerical error of “*hunhun*” 昏昏, related to the “*buyi*” 不怡 before. Or we can read it as the Prince lost his spirit of continuing the banquet after hearing Tian Guang’s death. So he invest Jing Ke another day – “*minshi* day.” Here “*minshi*” maybe a local way to number the date in Yan.

180 Here Xia Fu wants to “*wei gan zhi*” 微感之. I translate it as “make him feel humiliated,” in other words, Xia Fu asks Jing Ke difficult questions to obstruct him. It is reasonable for Xia Fu to do this as an old retainer and Jing Ke is a new one.

181 “Gan Tang” 甘棠 is a poem about the worthy of Duke Zhao of Yan. Here Jing Ke used this to represent the past good days of the Yan state.

182 About this sentence, “*jing jiu*” 竟酒 can be read as “until the end of banquet” or “they have a match about drinking” both two meanings can make sense here. Considering the plot of Xia Fu questions Jing Ke before, I tend to translate it as “until the end of banquet, (many retainers question Jing Ke,) but no one can defeat him,” rather than “they have a match about

and he thought that with Jing Ke, he won't have to worry about Qin anymore.

On the next day the Prince went to the east palace with Jing Ke. They watched the view beside the pool. Ke picked up the tiles and threw them to the turtles. The Prince ordered one to hold a plate of gold for him.¹⁸³ After Jing Ke threw all of them, they presented again. Ke said: "I stopped not because of the Prince is sparing of gold, but just that my arm is in pain."

Later they rode the good horses together. Ke said: "I heard that the good horses' livers are delicious." The Prince immediately killed the horses and presented the liver.

When general Fan offended Qin, and Qin was urgently after him, he came to the Prince. The Prince set up a banquet on the Huayang terrace. In the banquet, the Prince presented a beauty skilled at playing the zither. Ke said: "What good hands the player has!" The Prince immediately presented her to Jing Ke. Ke said: "I just like her hands." The Prince cut off the hands, putting them on a jade plate hold to present them.

The Prince often ate at the same table and slept in the same bed with Jing Ke.

After days, Jing Ke said leisurely: "I served you, the Prince, already three years here. And you treated me very well: using gold to throw at the turtles, killing good horses to get livers, presenting the beauty's hands on a jade plate. Even if an ordinary man, after receiving this would be willing to supply their meager skills and serve as dogs and horses. Now I have frequently served beside the gentlemen, I have heard that as for the moral courage of brave knight, he can treat death lighter than a feather, but righteousness heavier than the Tai Mountain. I just want to hear where my usefulness resides. My Prince, please let me know."

The Prince arranged his sleeve, seriously said: "When I traveled to the Qin state, Qin treated me not in accordance with the Way. I felt ashamed about living together with them. Now Sir Jing does not deem me unworthy, and visits this small state. Now I have disturbed

drinking and no one can drink more than Jing Ke."

183 Here "*pan*" 槃 has the same meaning as "*pan*" 盤. It means the Prince present a plate of gold for Jing Ke to throw. In *Shiji*'s footnote (p. 1970), it describes "*taizi peng jinwan jin zhi*" 太子捧金丸進之, "the Prince holds gold balls and presents to Jing Ke for throwing."

the respectable man on account of the matters of the soil and grain altar. I don't know what I am talking about.”¹⁸⁴

Ke said: “Now as for the states in the world, no one is stronger than Qin. Now you, my Prince, your power cannot threaten the other feudal lords, so they will not consent to be employed by you. If you lead the army of Yan to try to defeat it, that is just like sending a sheep to attack a wolf, or sending a wolf to chase a tiger.”

The Prince said: “I am worried about it for a long time, but what can be the plan?”

Ke said: “Fan Wuji offended Qin, and Qin was urgently after him. In addition, there is the area of Dugang that Qin covets. Now if we have the head of Fan Wuji, the map of Dugang, we can achieve success.”

The Prince said: “If we can succeed, even if it will cost the entire Yan state, I will be willing. But General Fan came to me in his worst situation, but I betray him. My mind will not find this good.” Ke was silent and did not respond.

After five months, the Prince worried that Jing Ke has regretted it, so he met Ke saying: “Now Qin has already defeated the army of Zhao, and their troops are already close to Yan. The matter is already urgent. Even if I want to use your plan, how can I do it? Now I want to send Wuyang first, what do you think about it?”

Ke was angry and said: “Why is the prince rushing me! One who sets off without return is a whelp!”¹⁸⁵ The reason I have not yet set out is just because I am waiting for my retainer.”

After this, Ke secretly met Fan Wuji,¹⁸⁶ saying: “I have heard that you, the general, offended Qin. Your father, mother, wife and son were all burnt to death. They seek you with

184 Here the Prince's word shows his hesitation, on one hand he wants Jing Ke to do the assassinating for him, on the other hand he feels shame to speak this to Jing Ke, thus he says “I don't know what I am talking about.”

185 This sentence remains the same here.

186 Different from *Shiji* and *Zhanguoce*, here Jing Ke went to see Fan Wuji before set off, while in those two versions, the plot of Jing Ke's argument with the Prince happens first.

the rewards of a city of ten-thousand households and gold of a thousand *jin*. I really feel pain for you. Now I have a word, which can remove your disgrace and solve the shame of Yan. Do you have your mind on it?"

Wuji said: "I often think about it. Day and night, I cry, but I just don't know the way. Fortunately Sir Jing is willing to teach me, and I am willing to hear your order!"

Ke said: "If I can have the general's head and the map of Dugang area of Yan, Qin will surely be happy. While happy, he will be willing to have an audience with me. I will use my left hand to catch his sleeve and right hand to stab his chest. I will reprimand him for the sins of betraying Yan and abusing you. Then the insult of Yan and your anger can be removed."

Wuji rose, shook his wrists and took the blade, saying: "This is what I desired day and night, and now I have heard the order!" At that time, he slit his own throat, his head drooped behind his back and his two eyes were still open.¹⁸⁷

When the Prince heard this, he personally drove the chariot hurriedly arrived. He threw himself on the corpse and cried. He was in such deep sorrow that he could even not control himself. After long time, there nothing he could do, so he sealed Fan Wuji's head and the map of Dugang, and made Wuyang the assistant.

Ke left without choosing the date. The Prince and those who knew the plan all wore white robes and caps to see them off on the Yi River. Ke rose to give a toast and sang: "The wind cries and the Yi River is cold. The bold man leaves and he will never return!" Gao Jianli struck the dulcimer, and Song Yi sang in harmony. When their sounds were grand, all the knights' hair bristled beneath the caps. When their sounds were sorrowful, all knights burst into tears. Finally the two warriors mounted the chariot and never looked back. When the two men past, Xia Fu stood in front of the chariot and cut his throat to send them off.¹⁸⁸

When they two travel past Yangzhai, Ke argued about the weight while buying the

187 *Yandanzi* gives more details about Fan Wuji's death, showing his heroic image.

188 Xia Fu's behavior may means his spirit will go to Qin with them.

meat. The butcher abased him. Wuyang wanted to attack him, Ke stopped him.

Going west they entered Qin and they reached Xianyang. The Palace Cadet, Meng Bai,¹⁸⁹ said: “Prince Dan of Yan feared your force, my King. Now he presents Fan Wuji’s head and the map of Dugang area. He is willing to be our vassal to the north.”

The King of Qin was pleased. He ordered the hundreds ministers to array themselves and the hundreds troops armed with halberd to stand beside the stairs, and then he received the messengers of Yan. Ke held the head of Wuji, and Wuyang held the map. The bells were struck at the same time, and all the ministers shouted “Long Live!” Wuyang was greatly afraid. His two feet cannot move and his face turned gray like ash.

The King of Qin found it strange. Ke presented himself and asked: “This is a petty man from the northern barbarian state, so he never saw the Son of Heaven. My King, please be a little tolerant of him and allow him to fulfill his mission.”

The King of Qin told Ke: “Jing Ke, stand up and present the map of Dugang.” The King unrolled the map, and at the end of the map, there was a dagger.

Ke used his left hand to catch the sleeve of the king, and his right hand held the dagger to the king’s chest, reprimanding him saying: “You have betrayed Yan for a long time, and your greed for the world does not know when to stop. Wuji was not guilty but you killed his whole family. Now I will take the revenge for the entire world.¹⁹⁰ Now the mother of the King of Yan was ill, thus I hurried here. If you follow my plan, then you can live. If not, you will die.”

The King of Qin said: “Today’s affair, I will just follow you! I beg that I can die while hearing the zither.”

189 In *Shiji*, this minister’s name is Meng Jia. However according to the footnote of *Yandanzi* (p. 14) we can also read it as his name is Meng, and “bai yue” 白曰 means he “reported to the King, saying...” Both two readings can make sense.

190 The original text may lose a “wei” 為 here, it should be “wei hainei baouchou” 為海內報讎.

So he ordered a beauty to play the zither. The sound of zither states: “The single silk coat, can be pulled apart; the screen of eight *chi*, can be jumped cross; the sword of Lulu,¹⁹¹ can be drawn out on your back.”

Ke did not understand the music. The King of Qin followed these words, pulled apart the sleeve, jumped cross the screen and escaped with the sword on his back. Ke drew the dagger and threw it at the King. The blade hit the copper pillar and sparks burst out. The King of Qin returned and cut off the two hands of Jing Ke.

Ke sat with his legs spread and cursed: “Sit.¹⁹² I am easily deceived by a whelp. That is why the Yan state not being repaid and my affair did not succeed!”

Original Text:

荊軻之燕，太子自御，虛左，軻緩不讓。至，坐定，賓客滿坐，軻言曰：“田光褒揚太子仁愛之風，說太子不世之器，高行厲天，美聲盈耳。軻出衛都，望燕路，歷險不以為勤，望遠不以為遐。今太子禮之以舊故之恩，接之以新人之敬，所以不復讓者，士信於知己也。”太子曰：“田先生無恙乎？”軻曰：“光臨送軻之時，言太子戒以國事，恥丈夫而不見信，向軻吞舌而死矣。”太子驚愕失色，噓唏飲淚曰：“丹所以戒先生，豈疑先生哉？今先生自殺，亦令丹自棄於世矣！”茫然良久，不怡，民氏日置酒請軻，酒酣，太子起為壽。夏扶前曰：“聞事無鄉曲之譽，則未可與論行；馬無服輿之伎，則未可與稱良。今荊君遠至，將何以教太子？”欲微感之。軻曰：“士有超世之行者，不必合於鄉曲；馬有千里之相者，何必出於服輿。昔呂望當屠釣之時，天下之賤丈夫也；其遇文王，則為周師。騏驥之在鹽車，駑之下也；及遇伯樂，則有千里之功。如此在鄉曲而後發善，服輿而後別良哉！”夏扶問軻：“何以教太子？”軻曰：“將令燕繼召公之迹，追甘棠之化，高欲四三王，下欲六五霸。於君何如？”坐皆稱善。竟酒，無能屈。太子甚喜，自以得軻，永無秦憂。

後日與軻之東宮，臨池水而觀。軻拾瓦投龜，太子令人奉槃金。軻用抵，抵盡復進。軻曰：“非為太子愛金也，但臂痛耳。”後復共乘千里馬。軻曰：“聞千里馬肝美。”

191 “Lulu” 鹿盧 may be the name of the King’s sword.

192 The Yandanzi original text is “wuzuo” 吾坐, which does not make sense. The footnote (p. 18) shows it may be “zuo wu” 坐吾. Thus I translate it like this. Maybe it is Jing Ke orders the King to sit, or maybe it is Jing Ke’s self-laughing.

太子即殺馬進肝。暨樊將軍得罪於秦，秦求之急，乃來歸太子。太子置酒華陽之臺。酒中，太子出美人能琴者。軻曰：“好手琴者！”太子即進之。軻曰：“但愛其手耳。”太子斷手，盛以玉槃奉之。太子常與軻同案而食，同床而寢。

後日，軻從容曰：“軻侍太子，三年於斯矣，而太子遇軻甚厚，黃金投龜，千里馬肝，姬人好手，盛以玉槃。凡庸人當之，猶尚樂出尺寸之長，當犬馬之用。今軻常侍君子之側，聞烈士之節，死有輕於鴻毛，義有重於太山，但聞用之所在耳。太子幸教之。”太子歛袂，正色而言曰：“丹嘗遊秦，秦遇丹不道，丹恥與之俱生。今荆君不以丹不肖，降辱小國。今丹以社稷干長者，不知所謂。”軻曰：“今天下疆國莫彊於秦。今太子力不能威諸侯，諸侯未肯為太子用也。太子率燕國之眾而當之，猶使羊將狼，使狼追虎耳。”太子曰：“丹之憂計久，不知安出？”軻曰：“樊於期得罪於秦，秦求之急。又督亢之地，秦所貪也。今得樊於期首、督亢地圖，則事可成也。”太子曰：“若事可成，舉燕國而獻之，丹甘心焉。樊將軍以窮歸我，而丹賣之，心不善也。”軻默然不應。

居五月，太子恐軻悔，見軻曰：“今秦已破趙國，兵臨燕，事已迫急。雖欲足下計，安施之？今欲先遣武陽，何如？”軻怒曰：“何太子所遣，往而不返者，豎子也！軻所以未行者，待吾客耳。”

於是軻潛見樊於期，曰：“聞將軍得罪於秦，父母妻子皆見焚燒，求將軍邑萬戶、金千斤。實為將軍痛之。今有一言，除將軍之辱，解燕國之恥，將軍豈有意乎？”於期曰：“常念之，日夜飲淚，不知所出。荆君幸教，願聞命矣！”軻曰：“得將軍之首與燕督亢地圖，秦必喜。喜而見軻，軻將左手把其袖，右手搯其胸，數以負燕之罪，責以將軍之御，而燕國見陵雪，將軍積忿之怒除矣。”於期起，振腕執刀曰：“是於期日夜所欲，而今聞命矣！”於是自刎，頭墜背後，兩目不瞑。

太子聞之，自駕馳往，伏於期屍而哭，悲不自勝。良久，無柰何，遂函盛於期首與督亢地圖，武陽為副。軻不擇日而發，太子與知謀者皆素衣冠送易水上。軻起為壽，歌曰：“風蕭蕭兮易水寒，壯士一去不復還。”高漸離擊筑，宋臆和之。為壯聲則髮怒衝冠，為哀聲則士皆流涕。二人皆升車，終已不顧也。二子行過，夏扶當車前刎頸以送。二子行過陽翟，軻買肉爭輕重，屠辱之，武陽欲擊，軻止之。

西入秦，至咸陽，國中庶子蒙白曰：“燕太子丹畏大王之威，今奉樊於期首與督亢地圖，願為北蕃臣妾。”秦王喜。百官陪位，陞戟數百，見燕使者。軻奉於期首，武陽奉地圖。鐘聲並發，群臣皆呼萬歲。武陽大恐，兩足不能相過，面如死灰色。秦王怪之。軻見請曰：“北蕃蠻夷之鄙人，未見天子。願陛下少假借之，使得畢事於前。”秦王曰：

“軻起，督亢圖進之。”秦王發圖，圖窮而匕首出。

軻左手把秦王袖，右手搯其胸，數之曰：“足下負燕日久，貪暴海內，不知厭足。於期無罪而夷其族。軻將海內報讎。今燕王母病，與軻促期，從吾計即生，不從則死。”秦王曰：“今日之事，從子計耳！乞聽琴聲而死。”

召姬人鼓琴，琴聲曰：“羅縠單衣，可掣而絕。八尺屏風，可超而越。鹿盧之劍，可負而拔。”

軻不解音。秦王從言，掣之絕，超屏風，負劍而走。軻拔匕首擣之，決秦王，刃入銅柱，火出。秦王還斷軻兩手。軻倨詈曰：“坐。吾輕易為豎子所期。燕國之不報，我事之不立哉！”

Among the three versions, *Shiji* provides the most complete one about Jing Ke. It contains the early period of Jing Ke and the affairs after his death. In this story, we can see Sima Qian describes Jing Ke not as a brave hero before he met Prince Dan. Different from Zhuan Zhu or other assassins in this chapter, Jing Ke does not appear as “the bravest warrior in the world” at the beginning. While discussing swordsmanship with Ge Nie, he escaped under Ge Nie’s glare. And in the dispute with Lu Goujian, he also acted like a coward. It seems that Sima Qian tried to use this kind of change to highlight the opinion of “a knight dies for one who understands him.” Thus in the daily dispute, Jing Ke choose to escape. But when Prince Dan, the one who understands him most came, Jing Ke realized that he can assassinate the most powerful man in the world for him. Very similar sentences can be seen in *Yandanzi*, while Tian Guang met Jing Ke, Jing Ke said: “if our thoughts are the same, I will not look back even if my whole body perishes for you; but if our thoughts are different, I will not spend even a hair,” and just like he said, he spent his whole body for the Prince because their thoughts are the same.

Another unique point of *Shiji*’s version is about the late affairs after the death of Jing Ke. It includes the perishing of Yan, Gao Jianli’s attempt of assassination and Lu Goujian’s signing. *Zhanguoce* also mentions the end of Yan after Jing Ke’s story, and this part of the two texts are almost the same. But *Shiji* adds the story of Gao Jianli trying to use the dulcimer

to hit the Emperor – at that time, Qin already conquered the entire land of China. This makes Gao Jianli appear as a hero. In *Zhanguo* this plot is very short – only one sentence – and in some versions of *Zhanguo*, even this sentence cannot be found. And in *Yandanzi*, he only shows as a dulcimer player. What is more, this affair not only shows the loyalty of Gao Jianli, but also provides the evidence that even Qin destroyed the six states, its government is still not stable and people of the six states are still trying to kill the Emperor and restore their states. The sign of Lu Goujian works in concert with the early plots. It shows the comment from other people, represented by Lu Goujian, changes after Jing Ke's attempt of assassination.

As for *Zhanguo*, the main story is quite similar with *Shiji*. Scholars also discussed a lot the relationships between the two texts. In *Zhanguo*, the story begins with the return of Prince Dan, and ends by the perishing of Yan. Thus, this text is mainly about Prince Dan trying to stop the King of Qin by assassination, but finally failed. Since the story is not only focused on Jing Ke, it is reasonable for not including the other affairs of Jing Ke in this text.

However *Yandanzi* provides a very different version. In this one, the Prince sent the assassin mainly because of his personal revenge. And for Jing Ke, he is no longer a coward like in *Shiji*, but a talented and romantic knight. This text contains a lot of details about how Prince Dan treated Jing Ke, including killing the horse for its liver and cutting off the hands of a beauty. There is a very interesting detail that I want to point out in this story. When Prince Dan presented a beauty that was talented at playing zither, Jing Ke's attention was on her hands – which caused Prince Dan to cut off the hands to present to Jing Ke in a jade plate. But when Jing Ke assassinated the King of Qin, it was just a zither player using music to help the King. And Jing Ke failed because of his not understanding the music – and his own hands were cut off by the king. This detail gives the story some ironical atmosphere. What is more, at the end of “Cike Liezhuan” in *Shiji*, Sima Qian argues “When our generation speaks of

Jing Ke, they said the fate of the Crown Prince Dan ‘The Heaven rains grain and the horse grows horns.’ That is going too far. Some also say Jing Ke hurt the King of Qin, which is also false.” It is just like the comment to the story in *Yandanzi*.

The core of Jing Ke’s story is: he tried to assassinate the most powerful man in the world in that period for one person who understands him. At this time, his success or failure may already become not important. What is more, his bravery also affects other people, such as Gao Jianli and Lu Goujian. One followed his assassinating action and one changed his comment on Jing Ke. Moreover, although Jing Ke’s assassination failed, it may still change the fate of states. Sun Jiazhou 孫家洲 has an interesting article “Sanci cisha xingwei dui Qinshihuang diyu zhengce de yingxiang” 三次刺殺行為對秦始皇地域政策的影響 (The Affection on the Local Policy of the First Emperor of Qin from the Three Assassinations)¹⁹³ which argues that the assassination not only threatened the body safety of the Emperor, but also changed his mind and partly makes him into the figure of a tyrant in later periods.

193 Sun Jiazhou 孫家洲, “Sanci cisha xingwei dui Qinshihuang diyu zhengce de yingxiang” 三次刺殺行為對秦始皇地域政策的影響, *Hebei Xuekan* 河北學刊, No.4 (2013): 51-55.

Chapter 4: Assassins as Exempla

In this chapter, we will discuss the situation of using these assassins as exempla in the argument. From these paragraphs, we may figure out how the catalogues of assassins formed from the Han dynasty. Again, I will do the translation first, and then, the discussion part. These examples are the ones I pick from the writings from the Han. I chose them because they represent the different situations for which the catalogues are employed.

The most famous usage of this catalogue may be the one in *Zhanguo*. This paragraph is found in the chapter “Weice” 魏策, and the story is Tang Ju 唐且 meeting the king of Qin to discuss the affair about his state, Anling 安陵. During the discussion, the king of Qin threatened him and Tang Ju replied with the assassins’ catalogue. He argues:

Translation of the Zhanguo passage:

The king of Qin burst into anger. He told Tang Ju, saying: “Have you ever heard about the anger of the Son of Heaven?”

Tang Ju answered: “I haven’t heard about it.”

The king of Qin said: “When the Son of Heaven is angry, millions of people will be killed, and thousands *li* of lands will be covered by blood.”¹⁹⁴

Tang Ju said: “My king, have you heard about the anger of those in plain clothes?”

The king of Qin said: “As for the anger of those in plain clothes, that is just taking off their hats and shoes, or using their heads to hit the ground.”

Tang Ju said: “This is the anger of commoners, not the anger of knights. When Zhuan Zhu assassinated King Liao, the comet eclipsed the moon; when Nie Zheng assassinated the minister of the Han state, the white rainbow crossed the sun; when Yao Li assassinated Qin Ji, black eagles fought above the palace.”¹⁹⁵ All these three men are the knights in plain clothes.

194 Here the King of Qin has already destroyed states Han and Wei, his words means if you do not follow my words, I will destroy your state as those two.

195 About these descriptions, we can also read it as, “When Zhuan Zhu assassinated King

But when they had the anger in mind, even when it is not yet burst out, there was already auspicious halos descending from the heaven. Counting me there will be four [of such men]. If a knight must become angry, there will be only two corpses laid down, and the blood will flow to five paces far. The entire world will wear the white robes. Today is just like this.”¹⁹⁶ He drew his sword and stood up.

With his countenance greatly disturbed, the King of Qin kneeled and apologized, saying: “Sir, please sit, there is no need to be like this. Now I understand. As for Han and Wei being destroyed, but Anling can survive only with the land of fifty *li* – that is just because of you sir.”

Original Text:

秦王怫然怒，謂唐且曰：“公亦嘗聞天子之怒乎？”

唐且對曰：“臣未嘗聞也。”

秦王曰：“天子之怒，伏尸百萬，流血千里。”

唐且曰：“大王嘗聞布衣之怒乎？”

秦王曰：“布衣之怒，亦免冠徒跣，以頭搶地爾。”

唐且曰：“此庸夫之怒也，非士之怒也。夫專諸之刺王僚也，彗星襲月；聶政之刺韓傀也，白虹貫日；要離之刺慶忌也，倉鷹擊於殿上。此三子者，皆布衣之士也，懷怒未發，休祲降於天，與臣而將四矣。若士必怒，伏尸二人，流血五步，天下縞素，今日是也。”挺劍而起。

秦王色撓，長跪而謝之曰：“先生坐，何至於此，寡人諭矣。夫韓、魏滅亡，而安陵以五十里之地存者，徒以有先生也。”

In this dialog, Tang Ju threatened the king of Qin with the story of assassins, implying that if Qin keeps pushing Anling, he will be an assassin to kill the King of Qin. The argument about the difference between “the anger of the Son of Heaven” and “the anger of common

Liao, he is just like a comet eclipsing the moon,” which is simply rhetoric and have nothing to do with the mandate. It is an option, but considering the next sentence is “there was already the sign from the heaven can be seen,” the mandate one is a better choice.

196 Tang Ju means if you insist your idea to threaten us, I will be the assassin and only two people – Tang Ju and the King of Qin – will die, but all people in Qin will mourn for their king at that time.

people” is very interesting. It clearly points out the most attractive point of the assassins – they are only “*buyi*”¹⁹⁷ 布衣, which means common people, but they can kill the noblest rulers and change the whole political situation. In this story, we can imagine if Tang Ju really killed the king of Qin, surely he would die, but the Qin state would also lose the chance to attack other states. This is an important element Han scholars found in the assassins stories – even the people from lowest status can change the world.

Another interesting point shown in Tang Ju’s argument is the “mandate of heaven.” In his opinion, the action of the assassins can affect the nature phenomenon. But normally, this is only used with regard to nobles. For example in *Shiji*, there is record like:

During the time of the First Emperor, the comets have been seen four times within fifteen years, and the longest once lasted eighty days. The length of the comet can reach the ends of the sky. After that, Qin finally destroyed the other six kings with its troops, united the entire land of China and resisted the barbarians outside. Many people died during this period, and because of the rebellion of Zhangchu, the state went into war again in thirty years.

秦始皇之時，十五年彗星四見，久者八十日，長或竟天。其後秦遂以兵滅六王，并中國，外攘四夷，死人如亂麻，因以張楚并起，三十年之間兵相駘藉，不可勝數。¹⁹⁸

But here, these kinds of signs happen because of assassins. This may also show the social status of these past assassins is very high in the view of scholars in Han. They are treated as heroes, and believed to be even equal as the past rulers.

But *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論¹⁹⁹ uses the catalogue in a very different way. This book is about a debate between scholars in the Emperor Wu of Han period. Considering that the scholars focused mainly on the political ways of governing the state, they read the assassins’ stories in

197 Tang Ju uses the word “*buyi zhi shi*” 布衣之士. This is a very interesting phrase. “*Buyi*,” which literarily means “cloth gown,” represents the common people which can only wear cloth gown, different from noble ones who can wear silk. But “*shi*” 士, normally translated as “knight,” is often someone noble. Thus the phrase “*buyi zhi shi*” point out these assassins are “knights who wear cloth gown,” in other words, they lives the life of petty people but they behave like knights.

198 Original texts see *Shiji*, “Tianguan shu” 天官書 (The Book of Stars), p. 1157.

199 Wang Liqi 王利器, *Yantielun jiaozhu* 鹽鐵論校註 (Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1992).

quite different ways. In *Yantielun*, there are two paragraphs using assassins catalogue, both two of them are in the chapter named “Lun yong” 論勇, which means “Debating about Courage.” The debate is focused on the politics Han should have to face Xiongnu²⁰⁰. The first one goes:

Translation of Yantielun:

Jing Ke had planned for years but in the end his affair could not succeed. The reason for that is because his short dagger was not enough to rely on. The King of Qin was anxious about the unexpected. That he could cut down the warrior strong as Meng Ben and Xia Yu²⁰¹ is because of the sharpness of his long sword.²⁰² If Zhuan Zhu could only use his empty fist, he could not have avoided being caught. If Yao Li could not act on water, he could not have fulfilled his duty. People of the world all say Chu and Zhen are strong. That is because they have the armor made by rhinoceros leather and sharp weapons made in Tangxi.²⁰³ Inside, they have fenced cities; outside, they had sharp weapons. Because of that, they can threaten the feudal lords of Central States and defeat the enemy states. Thus, even when Meng Ben raises arms, a crowd of people will make his power slight; but even it is a coward, if well-armed, his courage will be doubled. That is to say nothing of employing the knights of the Wu and Chu states; those who can wave the sharp swords, kick the strong crossbow,²⁰⁴ and fight along with the barbarians in the Central Plains. It is even not enough to say one of them can defeat a hundred! In that case, the barbarians will not have matching soldiers, and

200 This word represents the barbarian enemies on the north. It is not a specific tribe.

201 Meng Ben 孟賁 and Xia Yu 夏育 are the names of two famous strong warriors in early China.

202 This sentence is very hard to understand. We can read it as “the King of Qin feared for not prepared,” so he prepared the long sword, and thus he could kill Jing Ke – the warrior strong as Meng Ben and Xia Yu. We can also read it as “the King of Qin was feared in the situation of not prepared, but he could still kill Jing Ke.” Considering the usage of “*danyu*” 憚於 in other writings, I choose the first one.

203 Tangxi is the name of a city famous for producing swords.

204 The crossbows need using feet to tighten up, thus the author uses the word “*jue*” 蹶 here.

their strength will not be enough to resist against Han. Their energy will surely decrease. This is just like Lord Shang expelling the troops of Wei and Sun Bing defeating the army of Liang.

Original Text:

荊軻懷數年之謀而事不就者，尺八匕首不足恃也。秦王憚於不意，列斷賁、育者，介七尺之利也。使專諸空拳，不免於為禽；要離無水，不能遂其功。世言強楚勁鄭，有犀兕之甲，棠谿之鋌也。內據金城，外任利兵，是以威行諸夏，強服敵國。故孟賁奮臂，眾人輕之；怯夫有備，其氣自倍。況以吳、楚之士，舞利劍，蹶強弩，以與貉虬騁於中原？一人當百，不足道也！夫如此，則貉無交兵，力不支漢，其勢必降。此商君之走魏，而孫臏之破梁也。

This paragraph analyzes the assassin affairs about Jing Ke, Zhuan Zhu and Yao Li. Among them, Jing Ke failed while the other two succeeded. The debater points out that the reason is because of the usage of weapons. Jing Ke only had a dagger but the king of Qin, his enemy, had a long sword. Thus even if Jing Ke was the bravest warrior, he still could not win the fight. And as we have read before, Zhuan Zhu had a dagger hidden in the fish's belly while King Liao had empty hands. Yao Li took the action on river with the help of water. Thus, the debater gets the conclusion that in the wars between the states, the fine weapons are the most important thing. He argues if we, the Han dynasty, can have the warriors armed with the best weapons, we will defeat Xiongnu easily. And at that time, they may surrender even without a fight because they know they will lose.

And the second one goes:

Translation of Yantielun:

Jing Ke held only a dagger and entered the unfathomably mighty Qin; the King of Qin was frightened and lost his defend, and all his bodyguards were afraid. Zhuan Zhu got close to the king who leads ten thousand chariots only with a sword, and assassinated the King of Wu. His body remained standing after it was destroyed, and his light is stronger than any

other people within a thousand *li*.²⁰⁵ Nie Zheng set off from Wei,²⁰⁶ entered the court of Han and assassinated its master. He succeeded and fulfilled his duty. Then he killed himself in the court, and left his body exposed in the market. Now if we can find a brave warrior like that, riding the majesty of the strong Han, and suppressing the Xiongnu which has no righteousness. He can catch its vital part, reprimand its mistakes just like Cao Gui threatened the Duke Huan of Qi, and fulfill what we seek. If we can push forth our blade and destroy Xiongnu's sharpness, there would be chaos within the yurts, and their leaders and people would escape from each other. Then our crack troops will come after the assassin. There is no doubt that the Xiongnu will cross their arms and dare not to fight with us.

Original Text:

荊軻提匕首入不測之強秦；秦王惶恐失守備，衛者皆懼。專諸手劍摩萬乘，刺吳王，尸孽立正，鎬冠千里。聶政自衛，由韓廷刺其主，功成求得，退自刑於朝，暴尸於市。今誠得勇士，乘強漢之威，凌無義之匈奴，制其死命，責以其過，若曹劌之脅齊桓公，遂其求。推鋒折銳，穹廬擾亂，上下相遁，因以輕銳隨其後。匈奴必交臂不敢格也。

This paragraph is also discussing the politics about Xiongnu. This minister begins with the story of assassins to show that how much damage an assassin can make to a state. In his description all the three assassins are brave, heroic and unstoppable. He wisely ignores the fact that Jing Ke did not fulfill the duty but only argues he made the King of Qin frightened. From Jing Ke to Nie Zheng, we can see the descriptions of three assassins are stronger and stronger. Thus we can also infer that Nie Zheng maybe represent the highest status of assassin in Han scholars' thought. From this, the debater gets to the point that we can also send an assassin to Xiongnu, to destroy their state. And furthermore, our crack troops follow him to attack while Xiongnu is in the chaos of its ruler's death. In that way, Xiongnu will be

205 As for the phrase "*hao guan qianli*" 鎬冠千里, I read it as "hao" means "light" and "guan" means "to be the champion." Thus it means Zhuan Zhu's light is the shiniest in thousands *li* area.

206 Here the word "*ziwei*" 自衛 is not "protect oneself," but "set off from Wei state."

defeated easily.

Although the two paragraphs in *Yantielun* uses the assassin catalogues in different politics, we can still find the point that both of them use these assassins to represent the bravest warriors. Thus here is the second element of assassins in Han scholars thought – bravery. They dare to enter the unfathomably mighty states with only a blade, and kill the enemy leader with the cost of their life. This kind of bravery is possible to be a precious inner-quality that is praised highly by the scholars in Han.

In *Hanshu* 漢書, also translated as *History of Han*, the author records a different usage of assassin catalogue in the chapter “Jia Yi zhuan” 賈誼傳 (The Biography of Jia Yi). As another important historical record following *Shiji*, *Hanshu* is written by Ban Gu 班固 (32-92 CE) in the Eastern Han dynasty. The book was finished around 80 CE and similar to *Shiji*, it is also divided into different parts with different genres. *Hanshu* has “Ji” 記 (Annals), “Biao” 表 (Tables), “Zhi” 志 (Treatises) and “Zhuan” 傳 (Biographies). Since it focus on the Han dynasty, it does not have the “Shijia” 世家 part as *Shiji*. And because of the title of book already uses “Shu” 書, it changes the “Shu” part from *Shiji* into “Zhi.” Basically, it is another important history source while studying about the history of Han.

The “Jia Yi zhuan” is the biography about Jia Yi 賈誼 (200-168 BCE), who is one of the most famous scholars in the Han dynasty. Even in Tang poems, we have sentence praising him “As for the talent of Jia Yi, indeed no one can compare with him” 賈生才調更無倫. In this chapter, it recorded that Jia Yi uses the assassin cases to in his memorial to the Emperor Wen of Han. He heard that the four sons of King Li of Huainan 淮南厲王 were all enfeoffed as marquis, and he worried that the Emperor may go further to make them kings again. King Li of Huainan, who was the brother of Emperor Wen, died because of fasting after being caught by the crime of rebellion. Although trying to rebel, King Li was still the beloved

brother of the Emperor, so he enfeoffed King Li's sons. Jia Yi pointed out it can be dangerous since it could be said that Emperor Wen killed their father. Giving them title and lands was just like giving them chance to take revenge. In the chapter, Jia Yi was recorded saying:

Translation of Hanshu:

If you give the enemies the resources that can threaten the Han dynasty, that will be inconvenient for the governing plan. Although you divided the land into four pieces, the four sons' minds are still the same. Giving them people and providing them wealth, then you will either find revengers like Zixu and Baigong²⁰⁷ in Guangdu or suspect assassins like Zhuan Zhu and Jing Ke rising between pillars. This is called lending the weapons to enemies and giving wings to tigers. My Emperor, please pay attention to it!²⁰⁸

Original Text:

夫擅仇人足以危漢之資，於策不便。雖割而為四，四子一心也。予之眾，積之財，此非有子胥、白公報於廣都之中，即疑有剽諸、荊軻起於兩柱之間，所謂假賊兵為虎翼者也。願陛下少留計！

In this argument, Jia Yi uses the assassin catalogue to warn the Emperor of the bad situation he may face in the future. From this sentence, we can get two pieces of information. Firstly, the assassins, Zhuan Zhu and Jing Ke, have the same status as ancient generals like Wu Zixu and Baigong Sheng. What is more, scholars in Han may have a kind of thought that assassins are the foils of the emperor. It may look like the two sides of a coin. When the state is governed well, the emperor will be safe on his throne. But on the contrary, if the state is in chaos, the assassins will show in the palace. Thus we may get the point that, the assassins also play the role of warning the rulers in the Han dynasty, driving them to govern the state well.

207 "Zixu" is Wu Zixu 伍子胥, and "Baigong" is Baigong Sheng 白公勝 (Sheng, the Duke of Bai). These two are both famous revengers in the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. Interestingly, both two of them took the revenge to Chu state.

208 Just as Jia Yi warned, the sons of King Li of Huainan did rise in rebellion and get killed several years later.

Conclusion

Let's get back to *Shiji*. Assassins in *Shiji* are featured in the “Liezhuan” 列傳 part. The first chapter of “Liezhuan” is “Bo Yi liezhuan” 伯夷列傳 (The Biography of Bo Yi), and in this chapter, Sima Qian expresses a very interesting view, which can explain his reason for writing these biographies:

Although Bo Yi and Shu Qi were worthy, their names only grew in prominence because of receiving the praise of Confucius. Although Yan Yuan was devoted to learning, his conduct grew in renown only because he rode on the tail of a *ji* horse [as the student of Confucius]. As for those hermits in rocky caves, whether they are selected or not depends on timing, and it is just like this. As for all the names that were forgotten and no longer praised, how sad it is!

伯夷、叔齊雖賢，得夫子而名益彰。顏淵雖篤學，附驥尾而行益顯。巖穴之士，趣舍有時若此，類名堙滅而不稱，悲夫！²⁰⁹

Thus the purpose of these biographies is to record their affairs, praise their names, so that their names will not be forgotten in later periods.

In other words, these people shown in the biographies are considered worthy of remembrance by Sima Qian. Similarly, at the end of “Cike liezhuan,” he writes:

From Cao Mo to Jing Ke, among these five assassins, in the cases of some their righteousness lead to success and that of others did not. But it is clear that they all had determination. They did not sell their goals short. How can it be unfitting that their names will be handed down to later generations!

自曹沫至荊軻五人，此其義或成或不成，然其立意較然，不欺其志，名垂後世，豈妄也哉！²¹⁰

The location of “Cike liezhuan” among all the biographies is also worth considering. It is placed between “Lü Buwei leizhuan” 呂不韋列傳 (The Biography of Lü Buwei) and “Li Si liezhuan” 李斯列傳 (The Biography of Li Si). Both Lü Buwei and Li Si were the ministers of Qin, and both two of them have very big effect on the foundation of Qin Empire. Thus in Sima Qian's point of view, the role of assassins is comparable to that of the ministers. Although they work in a very different way, they both can change the political situation. As

209 Original texts see *Shiji*, p. 1691-1692.

210 Original texts see *Shiji*, p. 1975.

for the Qin Empire, if Jing Ke did fulfill his duty, what would have happened? Placing the assassins' biographies in between the Qin ministers, Sima Qian may have held a very similar opinion as Jia Yi, namely that assassins are the other side of the empire. They are hidden in the peace time, but when the rulers "lost their ways," assassins will reveal themselves and use violence to change the situation.

Furthermore, based on the evolution of the assassins' identity from the "zei" (traitors) in *Zuozhuan* to the "cike" (assassin-retainers) in *Shiji*, we can see that scholars begin to pay their attention to the assassins rather than treating them as tools. In other words, the scholars begin to turn their attention from the affairs of nobilities to that of the normal people. *Cike* is the best representative of heroes who were common people.

I believe that this phenomenon can be explained as a "re-emphasis on humans."

In Heiner Roetz's book *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age*,²¹¹ he describes the fall of Zhou as "the loss of dignity of Heaven" and "the failure of the divine power led man to direct his attention to himself. Religion lost ground to new speculations." According to Michael J. Puett's summary of Roetz's work, Roetz has argued that "with the fall of the Western Zhou, theism was destroyed. This led to a de-emphasis on divine powers and a re-emphasis on humans."²¹²

Assassins are the best images of a "re-emphasis" on humans since in their stories, since even the lowest person – such as a butcher or a beggar – has the ability to change the entire state. At the same time, we should not forget an important element within these stories, which is the motif of "meeting one's time." Like the famous catalogue in *Shiji*:

In the past, the Elder of the West was incarcerated in Youli, and he expanded the *Book of Changes*; Confucius was in a desperate situation between Chen and Cai, and he made the *Springs and Autumns Annals*; Qu Yuan was banished, and he composed

211 Heiner Roetz, *Confucian Ethics of the Axial Age* (State University of New York Press, 1993).

212 Michael J. Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 19.

“*Lisao*”; Zuo Qiuming lost his eyesight, and there was the *Guoyu*; Sunzi was kneecapped, and he wrote a discourse on *bingfa*; Lü Buwei was banished to Shu, and the *Lǐshì chūnqiū* was transmitted through the generations; Han Fei was imprisoned in Qin, and he wrote “*Shuinan*” and “*Gufen*.” Most of the three hundred poems in the *Book of Odes* were likely made by worthies and sages who gave expression to their rage.

昔西伯拘羑里，演周易；孔子戾陳蔡，作春秋；屈原放逐，著離騷；左丘失明，厥有國語；孫子臚腳，而論兵法；不韋遷蜀，世傳呂覽；韓非囚秦，說難、孤憤；詩三百篇，大抵賢聖發憤之所為作也。²¹³

A very similar sentence can be found in *Yandanzi*, when Xia Fu questions Jing Ke: “In the past, when Lü Wang was a butcher and fisherman, he was the lowest man in the world. But when he met King Wen, he became the teacher of Zhou dynasty.” The story of Jing Ke is a good example of “meeting one’s times.” Recommended by Tian Guang, who is also recommended by Ju Wu, a petty man is recognized by a prince.

This may represent the opinion of Han scholars, that when the right time comes, even the lowest man can affect the entire world, just like these assassins, none of whom have a noble birth, but all of their names are recorded as heroes. Even as individuals of humble origins, they still had the chance to change the fate of the entire state. This kind of spirit being heroes, sacrificing for the ideals, repaying the lord who understands them, and changing the history of the state through a personal action is highly possibly the one Han scholars are seeking for.

Thousands years later, assassin stories can still be found in today’s media, such as the *Wuxia* 武俠 novels and films. Just like what Tang Ju pointed out, even the most common people can threaten the emperor and change the world. When we read these stories, we may not only observe their bravery, righteousness, and loyalty, but also recognize that they reflect the dream of being able to change the entire state or nation even as a lowly individual. Such a spirit not only moved the scholars in Han, but also can also move today’s readers. The nobleness we find from these common people is also not any less than any emperors in

213 Original texts see *Shiji*, p. 2494.

Chinese history.

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